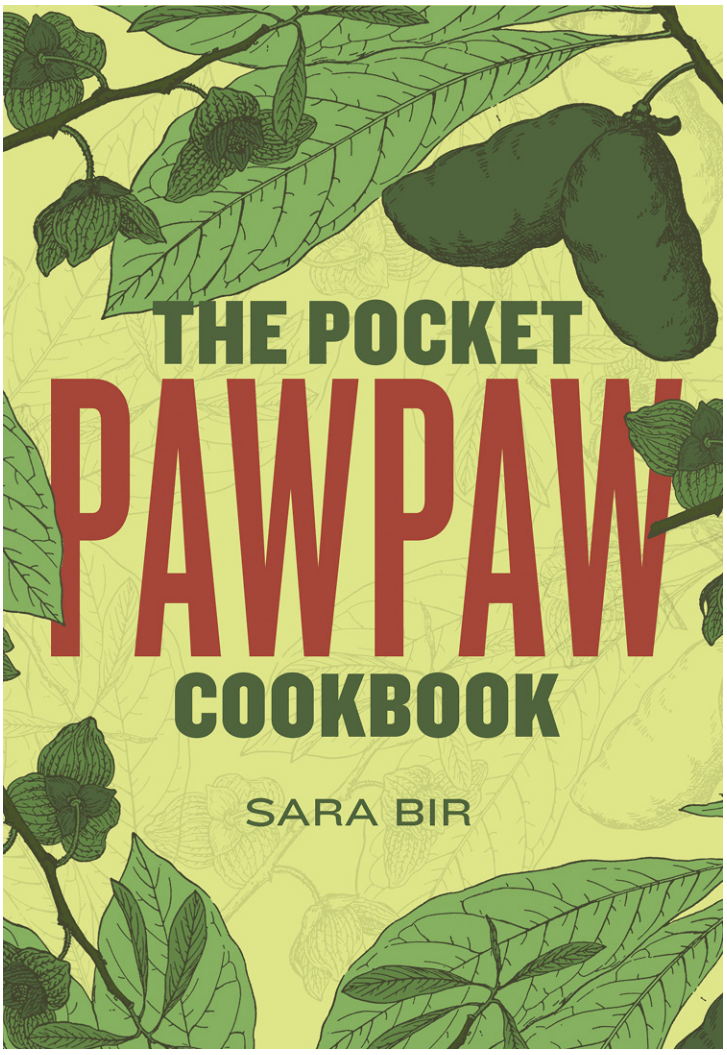
THE POCKET
PAWPAW
COOKBOOK
SARA BIR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For Edelne Wood

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Introduction

By Alexis Nikole Nelson

We'd been trudging up the river trail for a while now. Autumn hadn't gotten the memo, and we were surrounded by the kind of damp heat that only Ohio in September can conjure. As we lamented our choice of pants, feeling the heat reflecting off the pavement under us, a scent stopped us in our tracks.

"What's that … sweet … tropical… ?"

A grin grew across my face, as I pointed up to the bright green-yellow fruits, hanging from bending grey-brown branches, nearly hidden by the trees' huge glossy leaves.

"Those are what we're here for. Those are pawpaws."

Taking someone out for their first pawpaw forage is always exciting. It becomes straight-up exhilarating when it's *your* first one too.

I grew up in a city in southern Ohio where people talked about them like they talked about Mothman or the Loveland Lizard: something mythical hiding in the woods.

When I was a teen, I'd ship off to overnight camp for large swaths of the summer, always heading home for school just as the pawpaws in the area were toying with the idea of ripening. I knew where they were. I knew what they looked like. But we always crossed paths at the wrong time!

When I got to college, rumors abounded (okay, they circulated within a very small group of us crunchy native Ohioans), with tales of syrupy-sweet bounty waiting just north of campus along the Olentangy River Trail. But I spent my

fall semesters running between labs and jobs and stages, never having enough time to hike a ways north to see what I could find.

But here I was, three months out of school, finally staring the Hillbilly Mango in the face.

After what one could possibly consider too much online reading about pawpaws, I gave the lanky tree a gentle shake.

Thud.

A fruit a smidge smaller than my fist hit the ground, splitting its outer skin, revealing a surprising yellow custard center.

As I took my first, slightly dirty taste of the pulp, I wish I could tell you it was a spiritual experience, that for a second I left the twenty-first century and enjoyed my very first *Asimina triloba* in some alternate plane alongside the megafauna that spread them across the Eastern U.S. That as I ate, I shared and shook hands (paws?) with a giant sloth.

But that did not happen.

Obviously.

Instead it felt like finally meeting that person all your friends told you for years you'd love. And love them I did.

How To Eat a Pawpaw In The Woods

Serves 1 or more

Put on shoes you don't mind getting dirty. Wear clothes you don't mind getting sweaty. Go on a walk in a hardwood forest somewhere north of Florida, east of the Mississippi River, and south of Canada. The Ohio River Valley is a particularly good bet, though not the only one.

Learn how to spot a pawpaw tree. The best way is to ask someone who can show you.

Set out sometime between August and October in the netherworld of summer bleeding into fall.

Sometimes you can sense pawpaws are nearby from the smell alone: heady, honeyed, alive. Look above and below. The fruit itself will be an unassuming green. If you see a pawpaw on the ground, look up and try to figure out where it came from. If it's ripe, it will yield to the pressure of your thumb.

You can, and should, tear it apart with your hands. The tender flesh will be pale yellow to deep saffron. The aroma will let you know if it's ready to eat. It will offer sensations of mango/banana/citrus/pineapple in combinations you've not experienced before. It will hold large, dark, gleaming seeds.

Work the flesh out of the skin. Raise it to your lips and slurp. It will be sweet and creamy and totally new—every pawpaw in the woods is like your first pawpaw all over again.

Fling the skin aside. Spit out the seeds. Your hands and face will be sticky. Wipe your face with the back of your hand, and wipe your hands on your pants.

Think about what you just did. Consider the leaves and branches around you and imagine all the pawpaws around you that you won't, or can't, see.

Repeat, if desired. Leave the woods, gathering more pawpaws on your way out if they're available.

Go back home.

Do the woods seem different now?

Are you different?

Way Down Yonder

The box turtle is in the middle of the trail, and initially I think it's a giant rotting pawpaw, because the woods are riddled with pawpaw trees. If a ripe pawpaw falls from the tree and smashes open, it's the same black-and-yellow color scheme as a box turtle's shell.

But it's not a pawpaw. It's a box turtle.

On a hot late September day, when the leafy canopy is still at its peak, the shade keeps the temperature down at least ten degrees. It's a good place to run. I run there.

A pawpaw and a box turtle are generally dissimilar. A turtle is a reptile and a pawpaw is a fruit. Both hang out in Appalachian forests. Both are edible, though I think these days more people eat pawpaws, and not very many people eat pawpaws.

Pawpaws are long enough in the tooth that extinct animals like ground sloths ate them. When you taste a pawpaw, you unconsciously commune with your giant mammal ancestors. You savor the funky mango flavor and the slurpy, custardy flesh. Toss the skin aside and spit out the seeds, so that they may grow into future pawpaw trees.

People who know about pawpaws are likely familiar with the Pawpaw Song. It's an old folk tune with an actual name, but I forget what.

Where, oh where is pretty little Susie?
Where, oh where is pretty little Susie?
Where, oh where is pretty little Susie?
Way down yonder in the pawpaw patch.
Come on, boys, let's go find her,
Come on, boys, let's go find her,
Come on, boys, let's go find her,
Way down yonder in the pawpaw patch.
Pickin' up pawpaws, puttin' 'em in your pocket,
Pickin' up pawpaws, puttin' 'em in your pocket,

Pickin' up pawpaws, puttin' 'em in your pocket,
Way down yonder in the pawpaw patch.

It has variations. In this one, are the boys are finding Susie because they want pawpaws, or because they want Susie?

I lift up the box turtle and set it to the side of the trail. It immediately begins its way back. Box turtles do what they want, and this includes crap like heading directly to the dangerous spot they were just airlifted from.

A contrarian myself, I cannot stay off the trail. Like the box turtle, but faster. I have a family and a job I love. I go to the trail to not be with them. In a life of good things, running on the trail is one of the best.

Early fall is the right time to be out there. The smell of the woods changes every single day. Even at a brisk pace with no glasses and blurry vision, I can make out blaze orange chicken-of-the-woods mushrooms, scarlet spicebush berries, and tiny wild black cherries smashed like pockmarks on the trail. When the pawpaws are ripe, their skins take on a supernatural green-yellow hue that seems to glow from within. Botanists call it color break. It means the fruit is ready.

Also there is classic rock. It is a dirty secret. I should be able to go out there and have my pope-like communion with turtles and pawpaws without the distraction of piping loud music into my ears, but I can't. In pawpaw season, my poison of choice is Led Zeppelin. The rest of the year I make fun of Led Zeppelin. The rest of the year, I look at the pawpaw trees and wonder, do pawpaws even exist? Did I make them up?

At some point on the trail I dream up this awesome Robert Plant costume where I get two curly blond wigs: one for my head, and the other to wear on my chest like a body hair dickey. Over that is a blowsy unbuttoned shirt. Also, I'd wear threadbare, crotch-hugging rocker jeans and flimsy men's leather sandals like you'd buy at a head shop. Bonus: Robert Plant and I are both left-handed. He's a man and a musician, and I'm neither, but in the woods you can slide between two worlds.

Post-turtle, I near the last third of my route. The serotonin and adrenaline and John Bonham arena-rock drumming start to kick in.

Then I see the pawpaw and stop short. It's impossible to miss, even through the blur of a runner's high. It dangles alluringly from its branch into the exact center of my path, as if a prop master swooped down and fixed it at eye level just for me. This is a typically egotistical human sentiment, because a pawpaw could be anywhere and has to be somewhere.

It is huge. I pluck it, though you can't really pluck a pawpaw. If they are fully ripe, they release yieldingly from their branch and slide right into your palm, weighty and willing. Its skin is smooth and its warmth throbs in my hand.

I am wearing a pair of skimpy lime green running shorts and I remember they have pockets. I put the pawpaw in my pocket—*I put the pawpaw in my pocket!*—and resume. Ripe pawpaws are fleshy and delicate. The Pawpaw Song is very misleading. A pocket is the worst place you can put a pawpaw.

Led Zeppelin plays in my sweaty headphones. Let's say it's "Misty Mountain Hop." I put my hand in my pocket and on the pawpaw, which vibrates with deviant energy, and suddenly the delicious intersection is clear. I am Robert Plant. I have a giant package, and that package is a pawpaw. I wield the sexual power of a virile British douchebag. I hang out in the woods with box turtles. Thousands of teenagers yearn to fuck me. I feel the follicles of my chest hair dickey oscillating.

Going into the woods takes you to strange end points. What's worse is not going anywhere. I'll take the woods, every time. Susie does not need anyone to find her. She's fine alone, way down yonder at the intersection of box turtles and pawpaws, the place with no problems or solutions. Just being.

Why Pawpaws?

Pawpaws were here first. Before humans dwelled in North America, pawpaw trees grew. It is possible that pawpaws will still grow after there are no humans on this planet.

In our age of packaged foods and commodity crops, pawpaws remind us we are part of nature. We are unaccustomed to thinking big, succulent fruit can grow wild, and we can find it and eat it, and that it is very much worth eating.

A pawpaw on the branch is well camouflaged, blah green with occasional black freckles, nothing special at all. Strip away the skin, and the flesh you discover inside is the saturated color of the yolk of a duck egg, with a mango-banana flavor that can knock flat any tropical occupant of Carmen Miranda's hat.

It is best to come to the pawpaw rather than vice versa, as they do not travel well. The trip will be worth it, and the pawpaw will bewitch you, and then you and I will be friends. There is, I think, a pawpaw temperament: curious, engaged, humble. I have yet to meet a person who is drawn to pawpaws who is not a good person.

Asimina triloba is the most northerly-growing member of the Annonaceae, or custard apple, family. It also includes soursops and cherimoyas (if these give you allergic reactions, stay away from pawpaws). The tropical character of the fruit may strike you as uncanny, but pawpaws likely evolved to thrive in less balmy climates after arriving in North America through the migration of prehistoric mammals.

Pawpaws were presumably once big with ground sloths. Much later, Native Americans ate them. In our time, I talk to many older folks, especially in Appalachia, with cherished childhood memories of eating pawpaws in the woods, or of an older relative who savored them. But if they taste so great, why haven't we all been eating them for years? One reason is marketability. Pawpaws have short shelf lives. Another is the increased loss of regional traditions stemming from the rise of processed foods and industrial agriculture.

Why bother with pawpaws in their fleetingly short annual window when oranges and bananas can be easily and cheaply shipped, trucked, and bought year round?

Those shifts in our exposure to regional wild foods also limited our flavor vernaculars. Pawpaws call to mind the taste of many familiar foods, but ultimately they taste of pawpaw: bewildering to most, enticing to the chosen few.

Consumers today crave new flavors and old connections. For those who can find them, pawpaws deliver both. We live here; if we are part of this place, pawpaws are part of us. They are past, present, and future growing on glorious little trees you may have passed by a hundred times before.

Cultivated Versus Wild Pawpaws

Orchardists and fruit nerds have cultivated pawpaw trees for decades. Perhaps you grow them yourself!

Feral pawpaws are a wild card. They could be seedy, fleshy, bland, or intense. But growers typically raise cultivars developed to consistently yield fruit with plentiful flesh and minimal seeds. Some cultivars, like KSU Chappell™, offer more complexity. Some, like Shenandoah, are milder, giving them broader appeal to pawpaw neophytes. When growers plant pawpaws in full sun, the trees grow bigger, the fruit gets larger, and it ripens earlier. There are reams of very engaging literature on this subject. It is a wormhole I encourage you to thrust yourself down—look in the Resources section at the end of the book.

The forcefulness of a given pawpaw's flavor, whether wild or cultivated, will largely determine how much a recipe tastes of pawpaw. Think of how tomato-y a salsa made with homegrown summer tomatoes is compared to hydroponic grocery store tomatoes. I would eat either salsa! But cultivated pawpaws are more of a known quantity.

I use foraged pawpaws almost exclusively, because the act of foraging is a large part of the enjoyment for me. I also have a black thumb and own no land. A frequent daydream, though, is owning property, and what fruit trees I will plant when I do, and how many pawpaw trees and which ones.

How to Find Pawpaws in the Wild

Pawpaws have a decently wide range in America, but I think of their cultural and geographic epicenter as The Pawpaw Belt. It follows the Ohio River from Pennsylvania to southern Illinois in an Allegheny-Appalachian-Midwestern mashup. If you live in the Pawpaw Belt, finding wild ones yourself is not difficult. At first you won't notice them, but once you know what to look for, you'll spy pawpaw trees everywhere.

Think a year ahead

Pawpaw trees are most noticeable when their large leaves turn gold—they are one of the first trees in the eastern deciduous forest to do so. By that time, their fruit will have just run its course, but because of their lovely golden-yellow leaves, the trees will pop out of the landscape. Mentally file their location away to stake out the following year.

Look up, but not up too high

Pawpaws are understory trees, meaning they grow in the shade of other, taller trees (another such example is cacao, the tree that gives us chocolate). They typically get only twenty to thirty feet high, and often less than that.

Pawpaw trees like slopes

They also like riverbanks.

Where there's one pawpaw tree, there are probably others

Pawpaw trees tend to grow in clusters, because trees send out root suckers. In this manner they can reproduce without relying completely on seed dispersal. This is cool, but also why you'll see colonies of hundreds of pawpaw trees that aren't bearing fruit: they don't always have to.

Head back to the same spot again and again

Pawpaws on any given tree don't all ripen at the same rate. This means you have to *stalk* them. This act of returning to different stands of trees over and over can create an annual mania—a pawpaw fever, if you will.

When it comes to the long game, know that fickle pawpaw trees may fruit one year but not the next. So don't write off trees just because you don't see

them produce. I have a number of spots I check in on, and sometimes a productive patch comes up dry the next year, or trees that didn't do anything the past season offer lots of fruit the following season. Ah, the thrill of the chase!

Be okay getting thrashed

I usually wear shorts and a T-shirt when I seek pawpaws, but it's not very smart. There will be poison ivy to skirt, and thickets of multiflora rose to wrangle out of the way. You will likely get dirty and/or scraped. This is part of the fun, of course.

Don't rush

Any time you go out foraging, your brain needs time to ease into the right zone. Once your eyes adjust, you'll find you have a set of pawpaw goggles, and the fruits you would not have noticed ten minutes ago suddenly are impossible to miss. And then you'll be hooked and you won't want to stop and you'll be late for appointments, but it's worth it.

Be gentle with your pawpaws

It's not a great idea to put a ripe pawpaw in your pocket. They bruise easily. When I'm on a trail I sometimes haul them out in a backpack, but this can lead to casualties. Don't over-pack them, because the ones on top will smoosh the ones on the bottom. I save shallow cardboard produce cartons and keep them in my car so I can transfer pawpaws to it for safer transport.

Look for the pawpaw glow

When pawpaws are ready to pick, a faint powdery white bloom may cover the fruit. Underneath, ripe pawpaws can offer a subtle greenish-yellow glow that's difficult to describe without sounding completely dippy and mystical. It's as if the glow comes not from the taut skin itself, but underneath—from *inside* the pawpaw. Orchardists call this "color break." Some varieties of pawpaw have a much more pronounced color break then others, but if you see it, go after those.

Shaking the tree: pros and cons

It's okay to gently shake a tree to encourage pawpaws to release and drop. It is not okay to bend, mangle, or manhandle a tree.

After shaking the tree, there's usually a pause of several deceptively long seconds, and then a thrilling thud—or, better yet, series of thuds—as the fruit hits the leaves below. Sometimes you'll lose fruits, because they roll down a slope or fall into a thicket and can't be recovered. The fall will bruise the fruit, so it's best to process these fruits the day you gather them.

There is a minute risk of injury in shaking a pawpaw tree. My boyfriend was out in the woods once and overjoyed to find pawpaws—it was his first time encountering them on his own—but the tree was tall. He shook it, looking up in anticipation, and a pawpaw fell smack dab in his eye and scratched his cornea. It sent him to urgent care and gave him an asymmetrical squint for a week. The moral: when you shake a pawpaw tree, the pawpaws never fall where you expect them to.

Use a stick

Sometimes pawpaws grow out of reach. There are many times I've thought about the Aesop fable "The Fox and the Grapes" when I've spent five minutes trying to get a cluster of great-looking pawpaws that's a foot or two overhead. Unlike the fox, I only grow more determined to get at that fruit. An alternative to shaking is to find a long, sturdy stick and tap the branch.

Pick pawpaws off the ground, perhaps

Like so much else when it comes to pawpaws, it's a question of timing. A perfectly ripe pawpaw will fall off the tree, but you probably can't be there to catch it when it does. The next best thing is to harvest the pawpaws that separate from the branch with no resistance. They yield to your nudge.

A lot of the pawpaws you find on the ground are bruised, just a hair or two past ripe, and more likely to have off flavors. But sometimes pawpaws don't get damaged in their fall, and perhaps you came upon the fallen pawpaw not long after its plunge. I harvest a lot of pawpaws from the ground, because over the years I've developed an eye for the ones that are still good: taut, unbroken skin, flesh that's not squishy, no ants, no rotting fruit smell. In fact, if it's raining at the height of pawpaw season, I like to hoof it out to my favorite pawpaw patches, because the rain sometimes knocks the ripe fruit from the tree, making for easy harvesting.

Buying Pawpaws

After everything you just read, you could be thinking, "This foraging business is for the birds!" Fair enough. You may not know where to forage, or easily get to a spot where you can.

That is where the free market comes into play, my friend! If you can't pick pawpaws, buy them. During pawpaw season, look at the farmers' market. Where I live, most every farmer has pawpaw trees growing wild on their land, and if they feel like it, they'll gather some up and sell them. If you're really lucky, someone who grows pawpaw trees on purpose will have select cultivars to sell, and will regale you with enticing descriptions of each one's attributes.

Pawpaws networks thrive by word of mouth. Ask around! When people find out you're on the hunt for pawpaws, they'll kindly tell you about friends or family who live out in the sticks and have pawpaws for the taking. Also, don't underestimate the power of bartering. Money talks, but so do goods and services.

If you live far out of the Pawpaw Belt, you can order fresh pawpaws in season online for a premium. This gives you the experience of handling the actual fruit. More practical and economical is buying frozen pulp, once again available online through specialty sellers (check the Resources section).

Pawpaw, Cut in Half, On a Plate

Serves 1

I know a lot of people who like pawpaws best this way: unadorned. Think of it as the civilized counterpart to eating it in the woods.

Different people prefer pawpaws in different stages of ripeness. I like mine when they are dead ripe and bursting with fresh, sunny flavor. Others like to let them get good and brown (some might call it slightly rotten). They'll leave them out until they are gnat magnets, waiting in anticipation.

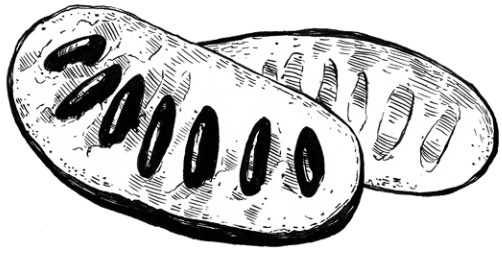
This manner of enjoying pawpaws is intended only for what you'd consider the *ne plus ultra* of pawpaws.

- 1 ripe and lovely pawpaw, chilled if you like

Cut the pawpaw in half lengthwise. It should be what you think is a prime specimen of pawpaw: beautifully ripe. Sometimes the seeds get in the way; if so, score the pawpaw lengthwise and twist a bit until the two halves release.

Put the pawpaw halves on a plate. It should be a plate you like a lot. Find a spoon you like a lot and dig into the pawpaw with it. You can work around the seeds or daintily spit them out into your napkin, or coarsely spit them across the room.

When you are done, you'll have a pile of seeds and two hollowed-out pawpaw skins. I don't know anyone who eats the skin. There's no good reason to.



If Pawpaws Are So Good Plain, Why Cook with Them?

After my first taste of pawpaw, I began cooking with them right away. Here was a new thing to go wild with. Chefs *love* encountering new ingredients. It's like a guitarist getting a new effects pedal, or a weaver using new fiber.

I like pawpaws straight-up, but only eat a few that way in a season. They're so intense in both taste and texture that I prefer them against a backdrop of other, more neutral ingredients to temper and complement them.

Even if you never plan to make a pawpaw recipe, thinking of them as ingredients can expand your culinary strategy and vocabulary. Read these recipes and make them vicariously, as an armchair cook.

How to Prep Pawpaws

When you have a big mess of ripe pawpaws, it is best to deal with them swiftly. They'll keep decently at room temperature for about three days, but you can refrigerate them to extend their shelf life a few days longer. Otherwise, you'll have an army of fruit flies and a pile of sad, mushy fruit to deal with.

It's often said that pawpaws don't ripen off the tree, but they do—a little. If, in your overenthusiasm, you picked mature but too-firm ones too soon, leave them on the counter for a week or so and they'll probably ripen up enough to use. Don't eat unripe pawpaws; that can cause intestinal distress. If you can cut into a pawpaw into pieces that cleanly keep their shape, that pawpaw is not ripe.

How to Process Pawpaw Pulp

To make pawpaw recipes, you first need to extract the pulp. It's hands-on and messy and takes a while, especially if you have a few pounds of fruit. Pawpaw pulp has the consistency of baby food, and blobs of it tend to get everywhere. To save excessive cleanup of dried pawpaw on cabinet handles, gather all your supplies before you commence. Consider taking it outside—once I started processing pawpaws on a table on my front porch, the whole affair became much more pleasant.

You'll need a food mill, sieve, or colander set over a bowl. I use a conical food mill with a large wooden pestle (I've not tried a hand-cranked food mill, but I sense the seeds might obstruct the mechanism). The mill sits on a metal tripod you set over the bowl.

Here's the system that works for me. Put the pawpaws in a large bowl or tub and fill it with cool water. Pluck one from the water and work thusly:

Don't bother peeling the pawpaw. Use your hands to break the pawpaw in half, as if you were cracking an egg (if the pawpaw is too firm to do this, it's not ripe enough to eat). Then run your thumbs between the delicate skin and flesh of the fruit. Let the flesh and seeds fall into the colander or food mill; discard the inedible skin.

Your hands will be covered with pawpaw goop. Grab another pawpaw from the water and you'll find the setup works like a giant finger bowl—you'll use it throughout this process to help keep hands goop-free. Continue separating the skin from the flesh until your colander or mill is about halfway full.

Force the flesh through using your hands, a ladle, or the pestle of the food mill. Initially the pulp will separate freely, but soon you'll find it takes some work. Lean into it! Sometimes I start with my hands to loosen the flesh, then graduate to the pestle.

You should have plenty of thick, soupy pulp, and a bunch of seeds mostly stripped of their flesh. Set the seeds aside (they are not edible).

Each seed is encased in a thin, slippery jacket of flesh. This part is edible, though to me it's fibrous and not as sweet or flavorful at the rest of the pulp, so I don't bother removing it from the seeds.

The pulp oxidizes like the dickens. Either use it right away or add one-half teaspoon of citrus juice (lime or lemon, I use what's handy at the time) per cup to acidulate it and slow the browning.

Better yet is Ball's Fruit-Fresh powder, available in the canning section of grocery stores. It's a blend of citric acid and ascorbic acid. If you process significant amounts of pawpaw, I heavily recommend seeking it out. I mix in 1/2 teaspoon for every 4 cups of pawpaw pulp.

You can refrigerate the pulp a few days. It keeps best with plastic wrap pressed directly on its surface. Pawpaw pulp has an odd tendency to become a bit gelatinous if it sits in the fridge for over twenty-four hours. No worries! Just give it a good stir before using.

A Better Way to Do Things

My method of pulping pawpaws is messy and laborious. I know there's a better way to do it and I've not found it yet. Besides, I'm just a one-woman operation processing two to ten pounds at a time.

The North American Pawpaw Growers Association shared a way to pulp pawpaws using a cranked tomato strainer by modifying the plastic spiral grape attachment and fitting the strainer with a salsa screen. This speeds up the process, but leaves a lot of pulp behind.

In his book *For the Love of Pawpaws,* permaculture mover and shaker Michael Judd recommends freezing whole pawpaws, then letting them partially thaw 20 to 30 minutes before peeling the skin off with a heavy-duty vegetable peeler, as you would a potato. Then you cut open the pawpaw, which is still firm, and fish out the seeds. This technique might be ingenious, but because I have a condition where contact with cold items makes my hands go numb, I've not been able to put it to use.

One season I'll try pressing pawpaw pulp free through very clean large-gauge wire screens set over tubs. Maybe that will do the trick!

Freezing Pawpaws

Freezing, in my opinion, is the most reliable way for home cooks to preserve pawpaw pulp for future use. There's a recipe for canning pawpaw preserves in this book, but otherwise, I don't recommend canning pawpaw, as heat does no favors to its flavor.

Freeze pawpaw pulp in zip-top freezer bags. My preferred amount is one quart (four cups). I measure it out and write it on the bag, along with the date, so I know how much I'm dealing with when I thaw it. It's best used within a year (I've used frozen pulp that was two years old and it was fine, though).

Thaw the pulp by setting the bag on a plate (the bags often leak) and putting it in the fridge; it'll be ready to use in about eight hours. Sometimes a significant amount of sticky, sweet, clear liquid will separate out. Taste the liquid and if it tastes good, stir it back in. If not, dump it. The resulting pulp will be a bit stiffer, and you can always adjust the consistency by adding a little extra of any liquid a recipe calls for, if needed.

Have a big mess of pawpaws and no time to process them? There are a few shortcuts. One is to free the flesh from the skin and freeze it, seeds and all. Another is to pop whole pawpaws in the freezer—no wrapping necessary. The times I tried these methods, I found it more difficult to separate the pulp from the seeds after thawing and I had a significant loss of yield, so I don't recommend them unless you're in a bind.

Units of PawPaw

You'll notice these recipes call for pawpaw pulp in volume measurements rather than individual fruits—that is, "1/2 cup pawpaw pulp" rather than "3-4 pawpaws." That's because the pulp you'd get from three to four pawpaws can vary considerably; what if your pawpaws are quite small? What if they're large but seedy?

Likewise, it's difficult to predict how much pulp in weight or volume you'll get from a pawpaw. When I process foraged pawpaws, it's not unusual for five pounds to yield four cups. Cultivated pawpaws bred for more flesh and less seeds will likely offer a better yield.

On average, one cup pawpaw pulp weighs about 240 grams.

A Philosophy on Cooking with Pawpaws

Pawpaws defy all expectations. That's what's so exciting about experimenting with them in recipes; while they have the flavor profile of many familiar tropical fruits, they also have a polarizing backnote that's pure pawpaw. This aftertaste—which can range from a compelling light funk in the best scenario to borderline fetid in the worst—really asserts itself when the pawpaw pulp is heated. This creates quite a challenge in developing recipes that highlight the best qualities of the pawpaw without accentuating its possible drawbacks.

Here are the two rules I've come up with.

1. Avoid heating pawpaw pulp.

Pawapaw is not at its best in chili, casseroles, soups, or stews. In cooked dishes, my preferred approach is to cook the other ingredients together first, *then* add the pawpaw pulp. Minimal cooking times keep the pawpaw's volatile flavor compounds more intact so you don't lose its brightness.

2. It's okay to heat pawpaw pulp when recipes are floury or very sweet.

Here is the major exception to Rule #1. Flour and sugar are big maskers of flavor. Quick breads, cakes, and baked puddings don't have the bad pawpaw taste; many taste fantastic! Baking transforms fresh pawpaw to a duskier pawpaw, muting its citrus and pineapple notes and accentuating its caramel ones.

For Optimal Success Following These Recipes, Do This.

Most recipes here call for pawpaw pulp, which has the texture of baby food but isn't totally smooth. For refined custards and beverages, puree the pulp. If the pulp would be best pureed and isn't in the course of preparing the recipe, I call for pawpaw puree in the ingredients listing.

Use a scale to weigh ingredients when a weight is given. A decent digital scale only costs about $20 and will make your rate of success in all kitchen matters skyrocket. It's faster and much more accurate than volume measurements. You may notice the grams per cup of flour in this book vary from recipe to recipe. I recorded the weight of the volume I measured at the

time I made it and just stuck with that; it's impossible to scoop out to identically weighing volumes of flour. However, 117 grams is always 117 grams. It's fair to quibble with this, but it's my book, so I get to call the shots.

If you are not using a scale, measure flour by scooping it into the measuring cup and leveling the top with a knife.

Get an oven thermometer. A cheap one works just fine. A lot of ovens are not properly calibrated and may run up to 50 degrees off. An oven thermometer will tip you off so you can make the adjustments.

If you are a bit shy of the pawpaw pulp called for in a recipe, make up the balance with mashed banana, applesauce, or pureed mango. Look around your kitchen and see what you can come up with that makes sense with the other flavors in the recipe. Yes, the recipe will come out slightly different, but you may love the results.

Remember, not all pawpaws are created equal. In simple recipes when you are using a lot of pawpaw and not many other ingredients (such as Pawpaw Fool, page 116), mild or bland pawpaw will give you underwhelming results.

One Fruit, Many Monikers

Hillbilly banana, Indiana banana, wild banana, West Virginia banana, redneck banana, papaw, paw paw: these are some of pawpaw's many aliases. Hipster banana is one of my favorites, simply because it's so ridiculous; the average pawpaw aficionado is far more likely to be an old timer or giant nerd than a trend-hungry scenester.

For all the charm of folksy names, you can't go wrong with *Asimina triloba*, the tree's Latin name ("triloba" refers to the two three-petal sets of the flower, which appears in the spring).

Papayas (*Carica papaya*, also tropical, but unrelated to *Asimina triloba*) also go by pawpaw or paw paw in Latin American, Australia, and parts of West Africa. This can lead to confusing search results for #pawpaw. That's why the North American Pawpaw Growers Association refers to the fruit as "North American pawpaws."

Fruits—edible and inedible both—often go by a contradictory assortment of names, so there's nothing unusual about our pawpaw's abundance of handles. I do think it's interesting so many of them contain the word "banana." Until the late 1800s, bananas were rarely seen in America (they were the fruit debs of the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, where they sparked a sensation). So those banana-centric nicknames couldn't date back *too* far.

Native tribes had their own names for pawpaws, of course. Some of them we know, and some are lost. Presumably the prehistoric moundbuilding Adena and Hopewell cultures ate pawpaws (mounds, and remnants of mounds, dot the Pawpaw Belt to this day). If anything, regional names have a story to tell, and it's significant a fruit known by so few worldwide has so many.

Bombs

You've probably heard of seed bombs: balls of clay embedded with seeds of beneficial plants, made to chuck into dreary patches of soil for guerilla flora activism. The idea behind pawpaw bombs is the same, though it's also intended to resolve the issue of pawpaw guts overrunning your compost bin.

After processing a mess of pawpaws, I compost the skin, but set the pulp-encased seeds aside, usually stowing them in empty milk cartons or yogurt tubs. Then I think of pawpaw-free areas where it seems like pawpaws could, and should, grow. I bring along the pawpaw bombs and hurl their contents into the air. It's fun because it feels rebellious, and I know I'm not introducing anything totally unfamiliar to disrupt that small sampling of ecosystem.

I've come to think of this concept as reverse foraging—that is, encouraging the growth of more native plants rather than just mindfully harvesting existing ones. I have no idea if this sloppy seed dispersal results in the actual growth of pawpaws (I do it with persimmon seeds, too), but it's worth it because it gets you thinking about possibilities. How would pawpaws make this place different? What can my one small action put into motion? Will I ever get in trouble for this? Try it yourself and see!

Pawpaw Seeds

Pawpaw seeds are really cool: they look almost black in the fruit, but with their pulp stripped, they dry to a mahogany tone. I have a whole bunch I've cleaned off that I set out in a basket to run my fingers through. Little natural objects can be soothing to handle, or just have around.

Don't eat pawpaw seeds or skins. Swallowing an intact pawpaw seed or a little skin should not be a problem at all. Ingesting seeds that have been broken apart is a whole other ball of wax. Let's say you blend a pawpaw smoothie that still has seed in it. Expect to issue a torrent of fluid out one end or the other.

Pawpaw seeds are surprisingly tough, though—I cleaned a bunch off intending to pierce holes in them with a needle for stringing on a necklace, and discovered the job is best done with a drill. So there's little likelihood of you needing to take a sick day because of inadvertently eating a crushed seed.

Possums, foxes, raccoons, birds, and squirrels will and do eat pawpaws, including the seeds, but they just poop them back out intact. I've seen remnants of what looked like entire pawpaws denuded in animal scat. Finding dry pawpaw seeds on a trail is not always an indication of pawpaws nearby; it simply means a pawpaw eater relieved itself there.

Compost Pawpaws

"How do you get pawpaw seeds to germinate?" is a common question aspiring amateur pawpaw growers ask. A true amateur myself, I found out accidentally: put pawpaw seeds in your compost.

The year I first came across pawpaws, I dragged pounds home and dumped their seeds in my compost bin. The following spring, I sifted out the humus and worked it into my planting soil. That summer, my raised bed was host to dozens of pawpaw seedlings.

Pawpaw seeds need a months-long cool period to eventually germinate when it's warm. Overwintering in a compost bin followed by inadvertent scattering in fertile soil is a surefire formula for a bumper crop of seedlings. The little guys have long, stubborn taproots and are a nuisance to pull up. It pains me to treat them as weeds.

My solution was to start setting the seeds aside and pitching them as pawpaw bombs (see sidebar, page 49). Even after taking this measure, I still have multiple pawpaw volunteer seedlings scattered around my yard every summer. A few I've potted and coddled, then given away. Five or so took root in the ground near my compost bin, so I let them be as an experiment to see how many seasons they'll survive. Who knows, I may end up with a mini-orchard after all.

Seasons of Pawpaw

Observing the changes in pawpaw trees over the year can mark the passage of time and celebrate our world's cyclical nature.

Spring:
After a long and cruddy winter, subtle buds appear on the bare and spindly trees, then open into cup-shaped brown flowers. After the flowers shrivel and drop off, tiny green leaf shoots emerge, and the trees truly seem to have come back to life. Ferns unfurl, chickweed sprawls, and black cherry blooms. Everything smells fresh and vital.

Summer:
With their handsome leaves unfurled, pawpaw trees contribute a tropical lushness to the woods. The flowers that were pollinated form firm, tiny future pawpaws that continue to swell as months go on. All the other plants assert their full glory, and the forest is a riot of green. Look up through the understory and the sun will illuminate the pawpaw leaves and it's just heavenly. Depending on how hot or cool the weather's been, some ripe pawpaws may fall to the ground as early as late July. The weeks that follow pass in a sticky, humid haze of cicada drones, buzzing mosquitos, and snaggy briars.

Fall: Squishable pawpaws continue dropping, since the fruits on a given tree ripen at different rates. You're able to go back and collect a few rounds over a few weeks. But the woods start to sound less buggy, the shadows get shorter earlier, and the ground gets crunchy as neighboring species of trees shed their leaves. Pawpaw leaves, which turn earlier than other trees in the woods, start to take on a yellow-gold hue, making them particularly easy to spot. By the time a new school year is well underway, pawpaw trees offer their remaining straggler fruit and lose their dead leaves, giving the forest an open, barren nudity worlds away from the muggy jungle it was only weeks ago.

Winter:
This is incognito season. The pawpaw trees, once so vibrant, now resemble

spindly bare sticks shoved in the ground. It's incredibly easy to forget they even exist. When the ground warms up and is wet and muddy, they once again offer buds, reassuring us the sparse mantle of winter is soon to vanish.

Where You Find Pawpaws, You'll Find Black Walnuts

After pawpaw season winds down, black walnuts start to fall from trees. They're another regional food with a deep-rooted culinary lore. Like pawpaws, they're in no danger of being overforaged. When they drop, still in their hulls, they look like petite, partially rotten tennis balls—pale green mottled with black. Liberating the walnuts from the hulls releases tannins that stain your hands—thus the name; the nuts themselves are not black.

Older Appalachian and Midwestern pawpaw recipes sometimes call for black walnuts. It makes sense, because they both grow with abandon and are often free for the taking. And isn't it a pleasure to make food using ingredients found nearby? A single recipe can have ingredients from multiple continents: vanilla, chocolate, coffee, hazelnuts. It's an everyday reality in our global economy, and our diets are generally the richer for it. But we miss out on foods and flavors as an expression of time and place. These days it's too often only affluent patrons of revered restaurants who can afford to eat a five-mile meal, whereas a century ago, black walnuts were a measure of economy, of making due.

I like black walnuts, which have a polarizing mossy taste you won't encounter with English walnuts. I don't think black walnuts and pawpaws flatter each other, so I don't use them together. Pawpaws and hickory nuts, though? Now we're talking. Hickory nuts are probably the only nut harder to shell than black walnuts. There's a reason you don't get black walnuts and hickory nuts and pawpaws in regular stores: they're impractical. Even I have given up on foraging and shelling hickory nuts. A person can only have so many far-fetched pursuits, and pawpaws already have staked their claim on me.

Q&A with Dr. Robert Brannan

Spend any time digging into the pawpaw community and you discover all roads about pawpaws and food science lead to Robert Brannan. He's a professor of food and nutrition sciences at Ohio University, and he's been researching the nutritional and physical properties of pawpaws since before his arrival at OU. in 2005. He also coordinates demonstrations and panels for the Ohio Pawpaw Festival.I had a lot of nitty questions about pawpaws, and Rob was the man to answer them. What follows are excerpts from a video call. I was in nerd heaven!

I've heard stories of people throwing up or getting nauseous after eating pawpaw cookies or drinking pawpaw liqueur. Why does this happen?

If you make a fruit leather out of pawpaw, you'll throw up. There are compounds in pawpaw called annonaceous acetogenins. When they get concentrated, they cause this reaction. Anytime you cook or bake with pawpaw, you run the risk of concentrating it down.

Observationally, some people just look at a pawpaw and they get a little queasy, and some people can eat them all day. I don't know if there's a certain threshold concentration that's the same for everybody or whether it's individual. It's not a desirable characteristic for sure.

Is it possible for pawpaws to ripen somewhat after harvesting? I always thought no, but I have observed nearly-ripe pawpaws getting softer after a few days on the counter.

Can I hit you with a little science? There are two different kinds of fruit: climacteric and non-climacteric fruit. Climacteric fruits have a respiratory peak —they go through this burst where they ripen. The classic example is a banana. You pick a banana in Costa Rica or wherever and it's green and hard as a rock and it's mature, but it's not ripe. You put it on a boat and send it to a warehouse in Columbus, Ohio and they flood it with ethylene, a ripening hormone. With a banana, we see it go through those stages. Pawpaw does it so fast you can't control it. What we think with pawpaw is as soon as maturity happens, ripeness happens at the same time. Bang, done.

It is likely the pawpaw you're holding in your hand has already been through its respiratory peak. If you pick it before that, it'll never do anything. What's happening with pawpaw is they are sort of technically ripening, but they're way at the end of their ripening process.

What's the best way to keep pawpaw pulp from oxidizing? Why are they so prone to it?

The enzyme that causes this goes by the initials PPO, polyphenol oxidase. Pawpaws are prone to browning because the enzyme is very active. What I've done in my lab is look at the activity of PPO in pawpaw. The enzyme is crazy active with pawpaw. Pawpaw has a pH that's right around 6, which is pretty high. Fruits that are more acidic have a harder time turning brown.

The best way to keep it from oxidizing is to remove the oxygen—vacuum packaging the pulp, but even that's going to turn brown because you have micro environments of oxygen in there. Adding inhibitors like vitamin C [ascorbic acid] helps.

Yeah, so pawpaw will oxidize like the dickens, even if you take precautions. Is it okay to use the pulp that's brown in spots?

If you can use it where people aren't going to see that it's brown, there's no reason to throw it away. With my students, we don't put vitamin C in ours, we just vacuum-package it. But it will turn brown after a few months, I tell my students to just mix up the whole bag when they use it.

As an aside, you look at an avocado, it used to be ten years ago, you could never find freshly prepared guacamole in the supermarket. But now they're all over in these packages with the plastic film you tear off. The technology that allows that to happen is high-pressure processing. When you want to pasteurize something you can heat it up, but high pressure—like 10,000 elephants standing on top of the guacamole—can pasteurize it, too. In certain fruits that pressure will also inactivate PPO and can do it at a low temperature, so the fruit is still fresh, but you're inactivating the enzyme that turns it brown. We did high-pressure processing with pawpaw, but unfortunately there's not enough elephants you can have stand on pawpaw to inactivate the PPO. That stuff is hearty! It looked promising, but it didn't work out.

If you were boss of the world, would pawpaws or pawpaw products (processed pulp, or items made

with pawpaw) be more readily available commercially? What would you like to see happen with pawpaws as a crop and food?

If I were boss of the world, there'd be a lot more I'd do than start with pawpaws *(laughs)*. I do talks and say to folks, "The pawpaw's never going to be a lunchbox fruit." My tendency there would be processed pulp, because that's the only way we're going to be able to get it out there. There are so many challenges to the whole fruit.

We need to find the varieties that grow fruit quickly with few seeds and lots of sugar and don't turn brown fast. We need to do the things that all the rest of the [fruit] industries have done.

Do you have a favorite pawpaw cultivar for eating?

For me, the first thing I look at is the absence of the negative—such as not much bitterness—and if those are gone, then I start looking for positives: an interesting flavor, the sweetness level.

The cultivar I like is Susquehanna. Unfortunately they grow so fast, they grow out of their skin and they crack. But they're really delicious. The ones that KSU developed called KSU Atwood are also really, really good. There's one here in town [Athens, Ohio] that's a wild variety and it's delicious.

When you eat pawpaws, what's your favorite way?

I like good pawpaws that are nice and fresh right from the tree, and I rip them in half and squeeze them in my mouth like a Push-Up.

Pawpaw Vinegar, or Embracing Learning Curves

In a Googling session I came across a pawpaw vinegar recipe that didn't seem right. It called for adding two pulped pawpaws to a gallon of white wine and refrigerating for two months. How it could ferment in a refrigerator? That would make an oxidized, pawpaw-infused white wine, not a vinegar.

But the seeds were planted, and I decided to try my own vinegar. My first attempt was exceptionally harsh. I'd started out by pouring a bottle of hard cider in a big jar and adding a couple gobs of pawpaw to it—no additional vinegar, no mother. The jar sat in my laundry room at an ambient temperature of 64-70°F, which is cooler than ideal. I kept the jar out a good three months or longer, hoping age would somehow transform it, but it only got grosser with time. Reluctantly, I dumped it down the john.

The second time I tried to make pawpaw vinegar, I put two cups of pulp in the same jar (now cleaned and sterilized), then gently poured in a 750 ml bottle of dry Riesling. I added about 200 ml of apple cider vinegar with the mother and set the works in the back of a cupboard that's the warmest spot in my kitchen.

The cozy cabinet helped with fermentation, and after a few weeks a sharp but clean aroma would waft out when I opened it. The vinegar tasted promising, but not sour enough. I let it go longer. The jar was hard to get to—out of sight, out of mind. By the time I took a moment to assess it again I'd let it go too long. Batch # 2 was a lost cause.

There's not a widely known, easy-to-follow road map for making pawpaw vinegar. One issue is the pulp floats to the top of the jar, so a proper mother never forms. I thought about making my own champagne vinegar and infusing the pawpaw--a more controlled way to go about it, but also a cheat.

Some things you have to try for yourself even though you have no idea what you're doing. Working with pawpaws will remind you of this over and over

again. Every mistake is a step forward into uncharted territory of pawpaw knowledge. How often do we get to do that in this age, with its glut of how-tos and tutorials accessible in seconds at a few taps on a phone? Navigating your own bumpy learning curve in real time is a privilege, even if you have no vinegar to show for it.

RECIPES

Pawpaw Lassi

Makes about 2-1/2 cups, to serve 2-4

You have worked hard for your pawpaws and deserve a refreshing reward. Here it is. This is thicker than an Indian lassi, more like a smoothie-lassi hybrid. The simple harmony of pawpaw and dairy is employed to full effect here. Instead of yogurt, I prefer thick and rich full-fat buttermilk. I've seen this in the store labeled as "country style" or "Bulgarian-style." You can substitute plain yogurt (preferably full-fat).

1 cup full fat buttermilk
1 cup pawpaw pulp
1/4 cup cold water
2-3 teaspoons granulated sugar
A pinch ground mace, nutmeg, or cumin

Combine the pawpaw pulp, buttermilk, water, and 2 teaspoons of the sugar in a bowl or large glass measuring cup and whisk until combined (you can use a blender instead if you want the texture to be totally smooth).

Taste and add more sugar, if needed. You're aiming for this to be very balanced: sweet, tart, creamy, fruity, all that. If it's too thick to be pourable, thin it out with a few tablespoons of water at a time.

Garnish with a sprinkling of mace, nutmeg, or (if you're feeling edgy) cumin and serve immediately. Refrigerate leftovers up to a day.

Green Tomato and Pawpaw Salsa

Makes 2-3 cups

Tomato plants start petering out right when the pawpaws are on the wane, too. A sudden bumper crop of green tomatoes calls out for the companionship of pawpaws. They're a fine pair, one tart and firm, the other luscious and creamy.

This began as the Green Tomato Chutney from Bryant Terry's book *Vegan Soul Kitchen*. Adding pawpaw pulp turns it from a chutney to a runny-chunky yellow salsa that's addictive with tortilla chips. It's sweet and bright, but not as cloying as some fruit salsas can be.

2 tablespoons olive oil
2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
1/2 teaspoon ground spicebush, optional, see Note
1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
4 cups diced green tomatoes (1/2" dice)
1 tablespoon rice wine vinegar
1/2 teaspoon fine sea salt
1 tablespoon chopped parsley
1 tablespoon chopped basil
1/2 cup pawpaw pulp
1/4-1/2 habanero or jalapeno pepper, minced*

Sauté the garlic in a medium saucepan until aromatic, 1-2 minutes. Add the spicebush and cumin; cook 30 seconds. Add the green tomatoes and cook until somewhat broken down and saucy, about 1 minute. The tomatoes will keep their shape a bit, unlike ripe ones. If they stick to the pan, add a little water.

Remove from heat. Add the rice wine vinegar, salt, and herbs. Let cool until tepid, then add pawpaw pulp and minced pepper. Taste and adjust seasonings, if necessary. Add more minced jalapeno or habanero to get to the spice level you want. The right balance between fruit and heat is intrinsic to this recipe's appeal.

Serve with chips, or however else you'd serve a fruit salsa. Covered and

refrigerated, it will keep about 5 days. I haven't tried freezing it, but it would probably work well.

*If you want more heat from the pepper, leave in the ribs and seeds. If you want pepper flavor but with not as much heat, remove them from the pepper before mincing.

NOTE: For the scoop on spicebush, go to page 58.

French Vanilla Pawpaw Ice Cream

Makes one scant quart, to serve 4-6

Sometimes the most elemental option is the best. I've tried making a handful of slowly cooked, custard-style pawpaw ice creams over the years, and often found them *too* rich and eggy, cloaking the pawpaw flavor. Then I came across a French vanilla ice cream made with whole raw eggs—the ice cream base itself is uncooked, in fact. You simply whip a few eggs with sugar, add the few remaining ingredients, and churn it up.

To embrace this recipe, you have to be okay with raw eggs. Whole ones, too, which is unusual in ice cream, but trust me on this one. If raw eggs wig you out, look up a procedure for pasteurizing whole eggs online (you can do it on the stovetop, or sous vide). If you prefer a cooked custard ice cream, look up the KSU's pawpaw ice cream recipe online.

2 large eggs
1/2 cup sugar
1 cup pawpaw pulp
1 cup heavy cream
1 cup whole milk
2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Whisk the eggs and sugar in a large bowl until somewhat light and fluffy. You can do this by hand, or with an electric mixer. The purpose of this step is not to increase the volume of the eggs as much as it is to dissolve the sugar—it'll take a minute or two of whisking. Check to see if the sugar is dissolved by rubbing the beaten eggs between your fingers; you should feel no grit.

If you want totally smooth ice cream, puree your pawpaw pulp (the slightly ragged texture of pulp that's not pureed makes for ice cream that's charmingly homemade). Add the pawpaw and the remaining ingredients.

Churn in an ice cream maker according to manufacturer's instructions. When the ice cream base has set up so it resembles a very thick milkshake in consistency, scrape it into a shallow metal pan and put it in the freezer. (It's much easier to scoop ice cream from a pan than the ice cream insert.) After 2 hours in the freezer, the ice cream should be at its peak scoopability. After 8

hours, the ice cream will be rock-hard, and you'll need to soften it on the counter up to 10 minutes before scooping it out.

This ice cream is best enjoyed within a few days. Keep the pan covered with foil or plastic wrap.

Baked Pawpaw Pudding

Serves 6-8

This is an old-fashioned baked pudding, not as creamy as a custard but smooth and rich, with intriguing caramel notes and an undeniable pawpaw kick.

In 2014, the *New York Times* included pawpaw pudding as its West Virginia entry for its "Thanksgiving Recipes Across America" feature, and there are quibbles you can easily raise with such a choice. Pawpaws are fruit of Indian summer, and not at all a Thanksgiving thing; were it not for the freezer, pawpaw pudding would be impossible to make in November. Still, pawpaw pudding is extremely similar in texture to pumpkin pie filling, and as a bonus, you don't have to mess with a crust. So maybe the *Times* is right. Consider reserving some frozen pawpaw for this recipe come the fourth Thursday of November.

With a food processor, it takes only minutes to blitz the batter together. (Note: minutes blitzing batter excludes gathering and processing of pawpaws.)

- 2/3 cup (93 grams) unbleached all-purpose flour
- 2/3 to 3/4 cup sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon table salt
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 cup pawpaw pulp
- 1/2 cup buttermilk
- 1/4 cup half-and-half
- 1 large egg
- 1 large egg yolk
- 2 teaspoons vanilla bean paste or vanilla extract
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted and cooled

Heat the oven to 350°F and position a rack in the middle. Grease an 8" x 8" baking dish, preferably glass or ceramic.

In the bowl of a food processor, pulse the flour, sugar, salt, and baking soda to combine.

In a large glass measuring cup or medium bowl, combine the pawpaw, buttermilk, half-and-half, egg and egg yolk, and vanilla. With the machine running, add the pawpaw-buttermilk mixture through the feed tube. Turn off

the machine, scrape down the sides, and add the melted butter with the machine running. Your batter should have the consistency of pancake batter. Pour the batter into the greased dish. Bake until the center is set but still jiggly (like a pumpkin pie), about 35-45 minutes. As it bakes the pudding may puff up, then deflate—this is normal. The edges will brown and the center will be flat, shiny, and amber-colored. Set on a wire rack to cool (the pudding will collapse as it cools). Serve at room temperature with crème fraiche or whipped cream. (I like this for breakfast with a big dollop of Greek yogurt, but I could say that about most any dessert.)

The pudding will keep 2 to 3 days at room temperature. I suppose you could refrigerate it, but it tastes better at room temperature.

MAKE THIS GLUTEN-FREE: Use 1/3 cup white rice flour in place of the all-purpose flour. You could probably use a 1:1 gluten-free flour blend and get great results, too.

Pawpaw Cornbread

Serves 6-8

Thousands of attendees flock to the annual Ohio Pawpaw Festival, where enterprising food vendors put pawpaws in most everything. You'll find pawpaw pulp squirted on pizza, pawpaws in mustard, and pawpaw coulis drizzled on funnel cakes. Sometimes these pairings are mere gimmicks, and sometimes they pan out. I had pawpaw chili there once, and it was fair but not great.

Stripped away from the merry revelry of a festival, pawpaws don't excel in every single item you put them in, especially most savory dishes that are best served hot. After much experimentation, I found this out the hard way; enchiladas with guajillo-pawpaw sauce seemed like such a great idea, but alas! They were horrid.

Pawpaw cornbread is a compromise. A big glop of pawpaw pulp doesn't do a batch of chili any favors, but when baked into cornbread, pawpaws lend a subtle tropical aroma that complements the slightly sweet cornmeal. This recipe makes a cakey cornbread. Serve it with your favorite chili and everyone's happy.

1/2 cup pawpaw pulp
1 cup milk
3 tablespoons honey
1 large egg
1/4 cup vegetable oil
1 cup (157 grams) all-purpose flour
1 cup (126 grams) cornmeal
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon table salt or fine sea salt

Heat the oven to 425˚F and place a rack in the center. Grease a 10" cast iron skillet or 8" x 8" baking pan.

In a medium bowl, whisk together the pawpaw pulp, milk, honey, egg, and vegetable oil. In a large bowl, whisk the flour, cornmeal, baking powder, and salt to blend. Pour the liquid ingredients into the dry ingredients and stir with a rubber spatula until no dry streaks remain.

Scrape the batter into the greased pan. Bake until a toothpick inserted in the

center of the cornbread emerges without crumbs, 20-30 minutes. Cool slightly. This is very nice served warm, but leftovers* will keep about 3 days.

MAKE THIS VEGAN: Use agave nectar or granulated sugar instead of the honey. Omit the egg, and use either 1 tablespoon ground flax seed plus 3 tablespoons water, or 1/4 cup aquafaba. Use the plain, unsweetened non-dairy milk of your choice.

MAKE THIS GLUTEN FREE: Substitute a 1:1 gluten-free flour blend for the all-purpose flour.

*Sometimes I cook stale, crumbled leftovers with milk to make a porridge that's incredibly satisfying for breakfast. Sprinkle a little cinnamon over the top.

Pawpaw Caramel Sauce

Makes about 2 cups

Adding pawpaw pulp to a classic caramel sauce is brilliant—very ripe pawpaw often has caramel notes, and they complement each other nicely. Or, if you have very fresh and tropical-tasting pawpaw, you get a good contrast. It's a smart way to make a little pawpaw go a long way.

This recipe is from Nancie McDermott's cookbook *Fruit*, from University of North Carolina Press's "Savor the South" series. Nancie suggests drizzling it over vanilla ice cream, pound cake, or bread pudding. It's also fabulous over cheesecake (plain, pumpkin, or pawpaw). Sometimes I nip it straight from the fridge. Even people who don't care for pawpaw in other forms will likely enjoy this; the pawpaw is subtle. This makes enough that you can keep half the batch and give the other batch away.

1-1/2 cups granulated sugar
2/3 cup water
1 tablespoon corn syrup, light or dark
3/4 cup heavy cream
1/4 teaspoon fine sea salt, optional
3/4 cup pawpaw puree

In a heavy-bottomed medium saucepan, combine the sugar, water, and corn syrup. Stir until the mixture resembles wet sand. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Cover and boil 3 minutes (this creates condensation on the sides of the pan that dissolves any stray sugar crystals that could lead to a grainy caramel).

Remove the lid and continue cooking until the syrup becomes amber-colored (Nancie calls this a "handsome golden brown"). Don't walk away from the pan—caramel goes from pale to burned in seconds! The caramel could take only 2 minutes to reach this color, or longer than 5 minutes. It really depends on your pan and your stove. Initially the syrup will be clear, but as it cooks the bubbles will become smaller and make more of a popping noise, and this lets you know you are closer.

Once the caramel reaches the color you want, remove it from the heat and slowly pour in half the cream. The mixture will bubble up like crazy, but don't

freak. Wait for it to settle and then add the remaining cream, stirring to smooth it out. Add the salt (Nancie doesn't call for it). If necessary, return the pan to the medium heat and whisk until smooth.

Scrape the sauce to a medium bowl. Add the pawpaw puree and mix until smooth. Cool to room temperature, then transfer to a jar. Nancie says this keeps for 2 weeks, but I've refrigerated it, tightly covered, for over 6 months, and it was fine the entire time, but that's because I didn't stick dirty spoons or my filthy finger in it.

Pawpaw Cheesecake

Serves 6-8

The pawpaw flavor here is gentle but palpable, and the cheesecake itself is creamy and dreamy.

Steaming cheesecake in a pressure cooker is a game-changer. No messing with water baths! I'm a total convert now. The drawback, if you can call it that, is the scale of the cheesecake: it's petite, in a 7" pan.*

Cheesecakes have a better flavor and texture if they're refrigerated overnight, so make this at least a day before you want to serve it. Drizzle slices with Pawpaw Caramel (page 44) for a stellar dessert.

For the crust:

3/4 cup (100 grams) graham cracker crumbs
2 tablespoons granulated sugar
1/4 teaspoon table salt
1-1/2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

For the filling:

12 ounces (1-1/2 blocks) cream cheese, at room temperature
1 cup pawpaw pulp
1/3 cup honey
1/4 cup heavy cream
2 tablespoons granulated sugar
1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/2 teaspoon packed finely grated lemon zest
Pinch salt
2 large eggs, at room temperature
1 large egg yolk, at room temperature

To make the crust: Grease a 7" x 2-3/4" springform pan. In a large bowl, toss the graham cracker crumbs, sugar, and salt together. Add the butter and work together with your hands until the mixture is crumbly. Pat it evenly on the bottom and a little up the sides of the pan. Freeze the pan while you make the filling.

To make the filling: In the bowl of a food processor, combine the cream cheese,

pawpaw, honey, cream, sugar, flour, vanilla, lemon zest, and salt. Pulse 5-10 times, stopping a few times to scrape the sides down. You want a smooth, homogenous mixture with the least amount of processing possible.

Add the eggs and egg yolk and pulse a few times more, just to incorporate the egg (process the filling too much and the cheesecake will puff and crack as it cooks and cools).

Pour the filling in the pan over the crust. Tap it gently on the counter to dislodge any air bubbles.

Put 1-1/2 cups of water in the bottom of an electric pressure cooker. Set the steamer rack on top.

Make a foil sling: take a 36" length of foil and fold it into thirds so you have a long strip. Set the filled pan in the center of the strip and use it to lower the pan (uncovered) into the cooker. Fold the ends of the foil back so they're not in the way, then lock on the lid. Program to cook 33 minutes at high pressure.

Once the cooker beeps, let the cheesecake sit in it on the "keep warm" setting for 20 minutes. Then unlock the lid and lift the cake out using the foil sling, being careful of steam.

If there's some water on top of the cake, blot it with a paper towel. The cheesecake should be golden and not wobble when you nudge the pan. Sit it on a wire rack to cool completely.

Refrigerate the cheesecake overnight, uncovered, before serving. It will keep 4 days in the refrigerator. You may freeze the cheesecake, well wrapped, up to 3 months.

VARIATION: Substitute gingersnaps for the graham crackers in the crust.

NOTE: You can make this in a stovetop pressure cooker, but you may need to add a few minutes to the cooking time under pressure.

*If you want a larger cheesecake, you can double the recipe and bake it in a 9 x 2-3/4" springform pan following the directions for Pawpaw Swirl Cheesecake (page 94). You may need to extend the baking time.

Vanilla Buttermilk Pawpaw Panna Cotta

Serves 6

Panna cotta showcases buttermilk and pawpaw's affinity for each other. Add a vanilla bean and you have deceptively simple little desserts to end a meal. They're a favorite for dinner parties because they're not too heavy and can be made ahead. Scratch that—*must* be made ahead.

I used to make these in adorable vintage aluminum aspic molds, but they're nearly impossible to unmold. Ramekins are much easier! Or you can skip unmolding entirely; now I do them in pretty fluted glass custard cups. This is lovely and delicate on its own, but for a striking contrast of flavor and color, serve with a dab of blackberry compote or coulis.

- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 vanilla bean (see Note)
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 2/3 cup (160 grams) pawpaw pulp
- 2-1/4 teaspoons (one .25-ounce envelope) unflavored powdered gelatin

Gather six 4-ounce custard dishes or ramekins for serving.

In a medium saucepan, combine the cream and sugar.

Cut the vanilla bean in half lengthwise. Scrape the seeds from the vanilla bean and add to the pan, along with the hulls of the bean. Heat over medium-high heat just until you see bubbles, then turn the heat to low, cover, and let steep while you prepare the other ingredients.

Combine the buttermilk and pawpaw pulp in a blender or food processor and blend until smooth. Transfer to a medium bowl. Sprinkle the gelatin evenly over the top of the buttermilk-pawpaw mixture. Let sit 5 minutes, until the gelatin swells and is no longer powdery.

Remove the vanilla bean hulls from the cream mixture. Pour the buttermilk-pawpaw mixture into the warm cream and stir with a silicone spatula and keep stirring until the gelatin is dissolved.

Strain the pawpaw mixture into a 4-cup glass measuring cup. Pour the mixture into the dishes, cover with plastic wrap, and chill in the refrigerator at least 4

hours, or up to overnight.

If you'd like to unmold the panna cottas, slide a paring knife around the side of the ramekins to help ease them out. Eat the panna cottas within 2 days.

NOTE: You can sub the vanilla bean for 2 teaspoons of vanilla bean paste or vanilla extract. If so, stir it in right after straining the panna cotta mixture.

Pawpaw Sorbet

Makes about 1 quart, to serve 8-10

This is a fine finale to a big, heavy meal—or many meals. Two good friends of mine served it at the end of their weekend-long wedding extravaganza, an event at a camp in West Virginia that included lamb barbacoa, trout caught in nearby streams, braised oxtails over polenta, and a giant brunch with farm eggs and home-cured bacon. The sunny yellow pawpaw sorbet served at the last meal of the affair was a memorable way to cap it off.

Sorbet's serving temperature determines how enjoyable it is to eat. If it's too icy and cold, it'll crumble apart in your mouth, and you won't get all the flavors. There's a payoff in patience: let it soften before you scoop it.

I use a squirt of corn syrup in my recipe because it makes the final texture of the frozen sorbet a bit smoother, but if a few tablespoons of corn syrup freaks you out, omit it and use 3/4 cup sugar instead of just 2/3 cup.

3 cups pawpaw pulp
2/3 cup sugar
Pinch salt
1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lime juice
1/2 teaspoon finely grated lime zest
3 tablespoons light corn syrup

Puree all of the ingredients in a blender or food processor. Churn in an ice cream maker according to the manufacturer's directions. The sorbet will be ready to pull from the churn when it increases in volume a bit and has the consistency of a very thick slushie. Don't over-churn it, or the sorbet will be too stiff and icy.

Scrape into a shallow metal pan (it will be easier to scoop later) and freeze 2-3 hours, until scoopable. If the sorbet is rock-hard (for instance, if it's frozen overnight), let it soften at room temperature 10 minutes before scooping and serving. Keep the sorbet covered with foil. It's best enjoyed within a few days.

Banana Pawpaw Ketchup

Makes about 1-1/2 cups

Banana ketchup is beloved in the Philippines. Jufran, the most popular brand, is goopy and dyed bright red and very tasty on rice-based dishes, or anything you'd use regular ketchup on. It was created as a substitute for American-style ketchup during a tomato shortage in World War II.

I got the idea for this banana-pawpaw ketchup from its Philippine counterpart, but it's really its own beast. I use a homemade five-spice that includes spicebush, a piquant little red berry that's also in season when pawpaws are ripe (store-bought five-spice works, too). The best part is how the anise-cinnamon-clove blast sets off the fruit. We cook the pawpaw just a bit to play up its musky notes.

Use this like a funky barbecue sauce with pork or chicken, or as a dipping sauce for egg rolls or lumpia. It jazzes up plain food in a snap. I'm happiest having it with steamed white rice, fried tofu, and bok choy.

1 tablespoon cooking oil (canola, avocado, or peanut all work)
1/2 onion, diced (about 1/2 cup)
2 cloves garlic, sliced
2 teaspoon minced fresh ginger
1-1/2 teaspoons Spicebush Five-Spice (recipe follows), or purchased five-spice powder
1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
1 tablespoon tomato paste
1/2 cup mashed ripe banana (2 medium bananas)
3/4 cup water
1/4 cup apple cider vinegar
2 tablespoons honey or agave nectar
1 tablespoon soy sauce
Salt to taste
1/2 cup pawpaw pulp

Heat a medium skillet or saucepan over medium heat. Add the oil; when it shimmers, add the onion. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the onion is softened and maybe a little brown in some spots, about 5 minutes.
Add the garlic and ginger; cook 1 minute. Add the five-spice powder and red

pepper flakes and cook 30 seconds, just until the spices release their aroma.
Add the tomato paste and cook, stirring constantly, until the tomato smells a little toasty, about 1 minute.
Add the banana, water, vinegar, honey, and soy sauce. Sprinkle a little salt over the top. Bring to a simmer and cook 10 minutes, stirring frequently. If the mixture is too thick and wants to stick to the bottom of the pan, add a little more water.
Add the pawpaw, return to a simmer, and cook 2 minutes, stirring constantly.
Transfer to a food processor or blender and puree, adding a little water if the mixture is quite thick. You're looking for a consistency in the sweet spot between runny and pasty.
Taste the ketchup and add salt, if you think it needs it. How much salt you need to add depends on how salty the soy sauce you're using is. The ketchup shouldn't taste salty, but a little salt helps bring all the flavors together.
Cool. As the sauce sits it may become thicker; stir in a tablespoon or two of water to loosen it up, if so. Cover and store in the refrigerator up to 2 weeks (I imagine it could keep longer, though). If you can't go through it that fast, you can freeze this up to 6 months.

Spicebush Five-Spice

Makes about 1/4 cup

Spicebush is a forest friend of pawpaw. I use it in five-spice instead of Szechuan peppercorns and black peppercorns, because spicebush has some of the same fruity-hot notes as black pepper, and some of the mouth-numbing qualities of Szechuan pepper.

One 3”cinnamon stick, broken into pieces
1 tablespoon fennel seeds
1 tablespoon dried spicebush berries
8 whole star anise
6 cloves

In a small, dry skillet, toast the spices over medium heat, shaking the pan often, until very aromatic, about 5 minutes. Transfer them to a small bowl to cool.

Grind in an electric spice mill until fine. Store tightly covered in a jar. For the best flavor, use in 6 months. Try rubbing it onto chicken before smoking it on the little charcoal grill, or use it 1:1 in recipes calling for apple pie spice or pumpkin pie spice. Snickerdoodles in five-spice sugar instead of cinnamon sugar are a favorite!

Spicebush, Neighbors of Pawpaws

In many forests where pawpaws grow, spicebush shrubs (*Lindera benzoin*) may not be far away. Spot them by their elongated red berries, no larger than your fingertip. These aren’t the kind of fruits you eat by the handful; they’re oily and piquant and best used dried as—surprise!—spice.

It took me a few years to branch out from pawpaws to other forageables, and spicebush was one of the first I latched onto. It’s easy to harvest, since you can tuck a handful of berries into your pocket and then let them air-dry passively on the counter. In a few days, they’ll shrivel up into brown nuggets looking not unlike rat poop.

Spicebush is clean and sharp, with notes of pine, citrus, and peppercorn. The

dried berries have way more oomph than fresh ones. Spicebush's flavor can be a shapeshifter—I'm still learning when and how to put it to best use. I add it to nearly every batch of bitters I make. My favorite way to use it is in ferments with earthy-hot ground dried chilis. It's also tasty in dry rubs for rich meats. You'll get the most flavor from it if you grind it shortly before adding to a dish. The berries have a lot more flex than other dried spices, and you can easily crush them with the flat blade of a knife against a cutting board and chop them finely if you don't have a grinder or mortar and pestle.

If you're not going to forage for spicebush berries, you can still get some. Integration Acres sells them—or, for that matter, I often have a stash. Get ahold of me and maybe we can work out a trade.

Nilla Wafer Pawpaw Pudding

Makes a ton! Serves 12

Banana pudding is, as the 1997 edition of *Joy*
of
Cooking
puts it, “really a home-grown
American trifle.” Instead of sliced bananas, this version—which I’ve adapted from the one in *Joy*, my favorite of all banana pudding recipes—features a layer of pawpaw pulp. It’s irresistible.

I suppose you could go really nuts and use both pawpaw pulp *and* sliced bananas. A pretty trifle bowl is an option for assembly, but I prefer a lowly Pyrex dish. Since this is so rich, you get lots of servings; a batch is ideal for large gatherings of pawpaw lovers.

Don’t buy off-brand vanilla wafers or low-fat ones; they’re just not as good. If you’re going to go through the trouble of making this, go all out.

- 1 cup sugar
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1/4 teaspoon table salt
- 3 cups whole milk
- 4 large egg yolks
- 1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- One 11-ounce box Nabisco Nilla Wafers™
- 2 cups pawpaw pulp
- 1 cup heavy cream

In a heavy-bottomed medium saucepan, whisk the sugar, cornstarch, and salt to combine. Gradually whisk in the milk, making no lumps of cornstarch remain. Whisk in the egg yolks.

Scrape the seeds from the vanilla bean and add to the pan, along with the hulls of the bean. Add the butter to the pan and cook over medium heat, whisking slowly but constantly, until the mixture thickens and bubbles begin to appear. (This can take up to 20 minutes; be patient.) Once you see the bubbles,

continue cooking for 1 full minute. Remove and discard the vanilla bean hulls.* Press plastic wrap on the surface of the pudding, and set aside while you assemble the other elements.

Line the bottom of a wide and shallow glass or ceramic dish (at least 2-quart capacity, but preferably a 9" x 13" dish) with vanilla wafers. Spread half of the pudding over the wafers, and then top with all the pawpaw pulp. Arrange more wafers over the pawpaw pulp (you may not use all of the wafers in the box), then top with the remaining pudding.

Press plastic wrap directly over the surface of the pudding and refrigerate at least 8 hours, though ideally a full day. Every banana pudding fan knows it's not ready until 24 hours of magical chilling time have passed, whereupon the vanilla wafers soften in the pudding and fruit, and all of the flavors of each element unite in bliss.

Right before serving, whip the cream in a large bowl until soft peaks form. Cover the surface of the pudding with the whipped cream, and then dig in. Refrigerate leftovers, covered with plastic wrap, up to 3 days.

* Vanilla beans are precious and expensive, and you can get more use out of them by saving spent vanilla bean hulls. I rinse them off, let them air-dry, and grind them in an electric spice mill. The ground spent vanilla beans have a mild yet undeniable vanilla flavor that I like to use when I don't want a new vanilla bean overpowering everything. I like them quite a bit in cooked fruit.

Andy Moore's Instant Vanilla Pawpaw Thing

Instant pudding was one of the first things I made on my own. My mom had picked up a set of eggbeaters at a garage sale, and sometimes when I wanted something sweet while she was at work (I was a classic 1980s latchkey kid), I'd get a pack of instant pudding from the pantry and mix it up, going to town with those eggbeaters. Sometimes I used powdered milk.

Andy Moore, a delightful person who literally wrote the book on pawpaws (P*awpaw: In Search of America's Forgotten Fruit*), told me about a pawpaw concoction he once made. It's a box of instant vanilla pudding, only instead of using milk, mix it with pawpaw pulp. That's it. That's the recipe.

Andy has since told me he revisited this concoction and feels it's not that good. But I've made it, and I think it's not bad at all. For maximum fun, beat it with eggbeaters.

Chocolate Chip Pawpaw Tea Cake

Makes one 9” x 5” loaf, or one 12-cup Bundt cake

Light, cakey, and sweet, this fine-textured quick bread is the sort of treat proudly displayed under cake domes in fancy coffee shops. The batter rises high with a golden-brown crown, and the chocolate chips add a hit of contrast to the pawpaw flavor.

You can bake this in all sorts of pans. A Bundt is handsome. I like four 5-1/2” x 3” mini loaf pans, because they’re easy to freeze and give away. A 9” x 5” loaf pan gives you the most interior crumb, which I think is the best part. This makes more batter than a standard 8-1/2” x 4-1/2” loaf pan can hold—it’ll overflow. If using that size, fill the pan no more than 2/3 full, and bake the excess batter in greased ramekins or custard cups.

Lately my favorite way to make this is the olive oil variation, which you’ll see at the end of the recipe.

2-1/3 cups (298 grams) all-purpose flour, plus more for the pans
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon table salt
1 cup pawpaw pulp
1/2 cup buttermilk
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/2 cup unsalted butter, softened
1 cup sugar
3 large eggs
3/4 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 350° F. Grease and flour a 12-cup Bundt pan, or a 9” x 5” loaf pan.

Whisk together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt in a medium bowl.

In a medium bowl, whisk the pawpaw pulp, buttermilk, and vanilla until combined.

With an electric mixer, beat the butter in a large bowl on medium speed until smooth. Add the sugar gradually and continue beating on medium speed for 2

minutes. Add the eggs one at a time, scraping the sides of the bowl down with a rubber spatula after each addition, and beat on high speed 1 minute, or until nice and fluffy.

Beat in half the flour mixture, then half the pawpaw mixture.

Mix until blended, and then repeat with the remaining flour and pawpaw.

Continue mixing until smooth. Fold in the chocolate chips.

Spread the batter in the pan. Bake until the loaf is golden on top and a skewer or toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, about 60 minutes for a Bundt pan and 70-80 minutes for a full-size loaf pan.

Cool the pan/pans on a wire rack for 10 minutes, then turn them out and set directly on the rack to cool completely. Tightly wrapped, the cake will keep up to 4 days, or in the freezer for up to 3 months. (I actually prefer the texture after it's frozen and thawed.)

OLIVE OIL VARIATION: Substitute 1/2 cup fruity extra-virgin olive oil for the butter. Beat the eggs and sugar with an electric mixer until they are pale yellow, fluffy, and tripled in volume. Add the oil in a thin drizzle. Beat in half the flour mixture, then half the pawpaw mixture. Mix until blended, and then repeat with the remaining flour and pawpaw. Continue mixing until smooth. Fold in the chocolate chips. Bake as directed above. As with all olive oil cakes, the flavor will be better a day after baking.

Key Lime Pawpaw Pie

Serves 8

The personality of this pie is seventy-five percent Key lime and twenty-five percent pawpaw. It's one hundred percent worth making.

It's another geographically impossible mash-up of fruits. Key limes are not native to the Florida Keys, but the pie is a lifetime local resident through and through. In its earlier incarnations, Key lime pie had a pastry crust and was topped with an appallingly sweet meringue. Over time, a graham cracker crust and dollops of whipped cream eventually became the norm, and for good reason: it's perfect that way.

So why mess with perfection? Why not! I got the idea for pawpaw Key lime pie from a recipe by Joe Trull of the Belton, South Carolina restaurant Grits & Groceries, published in *Edible Upcountry*. It's cool, creamy, and sour, with a pawpaw finish. Bake the pie a day in advance so it can chill thoroughly.

For the crust:

1-1/4 c (140 grams) graham cracker crumbs (9 sheets, or 1 sleeve)
2 tablespoons sugar
Pinch salt
5 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

For the pie filling:

1-1/2 cups pawpaw puree
One 14-ounce can sweetened condensed milk
4 large egg yolks
1/4 cup sugar
1/2 cup fresh key lime juice
1 teaspoon lime zest

To serve:

1 cup heavy cream

Preheat the oven to 350°F and position a rack in the center. Grease a 9" pie pan.

To make the crust: In a large bowl, mix the graham cracker crumbs, sugar, and salt. Add the melted butter, work together with your hands, and press into the prepared pan. Bake 10 minutes. Remove the crust from the oven, but leave the

oven on.

To make the filling: Pulse the pawpaw, condensed milk, egg yolks, and sugar in a food processor until combined. Add the lime juice and zest and process just until smooth. Scrape into the baked crust and bake 15 minutes. Cool on a rack, then refrigerate 8 hours, or overnight.

To serve: Whip the cream in a large bowl until soft peaks form. Spoon over the pie, then cut and serve. Refrigerate leftovers up to 3 days.

Pawpaw Ha-Ha Habanero Hot Sauce

Makes 3 to 3-1/2 cups, depending on how many habaneros you use

Bright orange and hot as hell, this sauce was inspired by the Ha-Ha Habanero sauce at Laughing Planet, a cheeky bourgeois burrito chain in Portland, Oregon. My husband at the time used to sneak out tiny plastic to-go cups of the stuff when he stopped in to get their Bubba Burrito.

Once you get past the infamous heat, habaneros offer flowery and fruity notes that pair well with pawpaws. Put ten habaneros in this recipe if you want it very fiery, something to dole out in small drops. As few as two gives you a sauce you can use in larger dollops.

- 1 teaspoon vegetable, canola, or olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 5 cloves garlic, peeled
- 2 carrots, grated (enough to make 1 packed cup)
- 1/4 cup lime juice
- 1/4 cup white wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons honey or agave nectar
- 2-10 habanero peppers, halved, seeded, and stemmed (if you don't wear disposable gloves when you handle them, you'll regret it)
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 cup pawpaw pulp

Heat the oil in a medium saucepan and add the onions. Cook over medium heat until soft, about 6 minutes. Add the garlic and carrots; cook 3 minutes longer. Add enough water to barely cover the carrots, bring to a simmer, cover, and gently cook 10 minutes. If, at the end of the simmering time, you have quite a lot of cooking liquid, spoon some of it off and reserve it.

Transfer the contents of the saucepan to a blender or food processor and add the lime juice, vinegar, honey or agave nectar, habaneros, and salt.

Puree, adding some of the reserved cooking liquid or a little water if it's too thick. Let cool a bit, add the pawpaw pulp, and puree again. Cool completely before putting in bottles or jars. Store tightly covered in the refrigerator—I've had it last up to a year. As the months pass, the heat mellows.

NOTE: I save empty sriracha squeeze bottles so I can make a batch of this come pawpaw season and give it away to my heat-loving friends. It's much easier to apply to your food when you can squeeze out the amount you want.

Beurre Blanc with a Hint of Pawpaw

Makes 1-1/2 cups, enough to sauce about 6 portions

Beurre blanc is an utterly simple sauce, little more than reduced white wine with a ton of butter. The magic is all in emulsifying the butter into the wine bit by bit—if you rush or get lazy about whisking, the sauce will separate. But if you make this with confidence it all comes together easily enough.

Serve it with delicate foods such as seared scallops, grilled shrimp, or broiled flaky white fish.

Because beurre blanc is a warm sauce, not meant to be served hot (high heat can cause the emulsion to break), the top notes of the last-minute addition of pawpaw stay intact. Beurre blanc is by nature a mild, rich sauce. Make things way more exciting with the habanero version below.

- 1/2 cup (2 sticks) good-quality unsalted butter
- 1 small shallot, minced (about 2 tablespoons)
- 1/4 cup dry white wine
- 1/4 cup pawpaw pulp
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- Squeeze of fresh lime juice

Unwrap the butter, cut into tablespoon-sized slices, and put in a bowl. The butter needs to be cold for the sauce to work, so if your kitchen is warm, refrigerate it until you need it.

Combine the minced shallot and wine in a medium heavy-bottomed saucepan. Bring to a boil over high heat and cook until reduced to about 2 tablespoons. Reduce the heat to medium-low. Add butter to the pan a chunk at a time, whisking or shaking all the while and waiting until one butter chunk is nearly assimilated before adding another one. The sauce should eventually look pearly and creamy. It will take about 5 minutes to incorporate all the butter.

Reduce the heat as low as it will go. Whisk in the pawpaw pulp and salt. Finish with a squirt of lime juice, then taste and adjust seasoning as needed. You can hold the warm sauce over the lowest heat possible for about 30 minutes, whisking occasionally.

It's very tricky to reheat beurre blanc without it separating; it's best enjoyed shortly after it's made.

VARIATION: For a Habanero Pawpaw Beurre Blanc, add 1 small minced, seeded habanero pepper with the shallots when you reduce the wine.
Or, if you have Pawpaw Ha-Ha Habanero Hot Sauce (page 70) or any other tasty habanero sauce around, add as many drops or squirts as you like when you add the pawpaw.

Pawpaw Gelato

Makes 1 scant quart, to serve 6-10

Generally speaking, the difference between gelato and ice cream is air and fat. Ice cream has more air churned into it and a higher butterfat content. Gelato? Less air, less fat. But no less enjoyable, and so incredibly smooth.

- 1 cup plus 3 tablespoons half-and-half
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- 2/3 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 2 cups pawpaw pulp
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 2 teaspoons freshly squeezed lemon juice

Combine 3 tablespoons of the half-and-half with the cornstarch in a small bowl. Stir until smooth; set aside.

In a medium saucepan, bring the remaining cup of half-and-half and the sugar to a boil over medium-high heat (keep an eye on it, as the mixture can boil over easily). Reduce the heat and keep at a robust simmer for 4 minutes. Stir the cornstarch mixture once more and gradually whisk into the boiling half-and-half. Once it returns to a boil, cook 1 full minute, whisking all the while; it will become thicker, but it still won't be terribly thick.

Scrape into a large bowl and whisk in the sour cream. Let the mixture cool completely (I recommend using an ice bath).

Once cool, add the pawpaw pulp, vanilla, and lemon juice. If you prefer a silky-smooth gelato, puree the gelato base.

Churn in an ice cream maker according to the manufacturer's instructions. When it's ready to pull from the ice cream maker, the gelato will have the consistency of a very thick, stiff milkshake. Scrape into a shallow metal pan (it cools the gelato faster and is easier to scoop) and freeze 2-3 hours, until scoopable.

Covered with foil pressed directly onto its surface, the gelato will keep about 1

week in the freezer. For optimal enjoyment, let the hardened gelato soften 10 minutes before scooping and serving.

Pawpaw Flan

Serves 8-12

Flan is such a glorious dessert, gleaming on its platter after unmolding. With its caramel crown and thin caramel syrup, it needs no accompaniments. Though a cup of strong coffee is nice.

This has the ideal balance of pawpaw flavor: not faint, not overwhelming. I usually use just yolks in my flan, but I opt for whole eggs here so the pawpaw taste can come through. The lime juice and zest sneak up on the pawpaw—give it a little oomph—but if you want more lime flavor, double the zest.

Make the flan a day ahead so it can chill thoroughly. This gives the custard time to set, and allows the caramel on the bottom of the pan to dissolve; when you unmold the flan, you get a splendid runny sauce.

- 2/3 cup sugar
- 1/4 cup water
- One 12-ounce can evaporated milk
- One 14-ounce can sweetened condensed milk
- 1 cup pawpaw pulp
- 4 large eggs
- 1 tablespoon lime juice
- 1 teaspoon finely grated lime zest
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/4 teaspoon table salt

Preheat the oven to 325°F and position a rack in the center. Have a 9” round pan ready on the counter (no need to grease it). We’re baking this in a water bath, so you’ll need a larger baking pan or roasting pan that the 9” pan can fit inside. I like to use a 12” round cake pan for the bath.

Make the caramel: combine the sugar and water in a medium heavy-bottomed saucepan. Stir together until the sugar resembles wet sand. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, brushing the sides of the pan down with a wet pastry brush to dissolve stray crystals. Cook, watching closely, until caramel is medium amber. This could take 2-5 minutes. Quickly pour into the 9” pan and tilt so the hot caramel coats most of the bottom (it’s okay if you miss a few spots). Set aside.

Combine the evaporated milk, condensed milk, pawpaw, eggs, lime juice and zest, vanilla, and salt in a blender or food processor; blend until combined. Pour into the caramel-lined pan.

Set the 9" pan in the larger pan. Add boiling water to come halfway up the sides of the pan holding the flan. Bake until set but the center jiggles like Jell-O when you nudge the pan gently, 60-70 minutes.

Remove the flan from the water bath; set on a rack until cool. Refrigerate 8-24 hours. To serve, loosen the sides with a metal spatula and invert on a deep platter that can hold the wonderful, loose caramel syrup that will come running out the sides of the pan. Serve in wedges, spooning the syrup over them. Refrigerate leftovers up to 4 days.

Pawpaw Milkshake

Serves 1-2

This is an idea more than a recipe. You know how to make a milkshake. You know pawpaw tastes great with ice cream. Follow your instincts.

There are a few ways to go about this, depending on what you want and what you have.

- Make a traditional milkshake with milk and ice cream, using either the Pawpaw Gelato on page 74 or the French Vanilla Pawpaw Ice Cream on page 38. I find two medium scoops of ice cream in a blender with enough milk to nearly cover the scoops works well. This version is the best and most similar to a classic milkshake, in my opinion, but it also has the least pawpaw flavor. If I had a diner, I'd serve these there around pawpaw season, garnished with whipped cream and Pawpaw Caramel (page 44). But I don't run a diner, so you'll have to make this yourself, or convince the offbeat diner near you to put it on their menu.
- Use regular vanilla ice cream and add pawpaw to it. This is a little trickier because the pawpaw sometimes fluffs up in the blender, making an oddly aerated milkshake. So you can't outright replace the milk with pawpaw. The balance of ice cream, milk, and pawpaw is a little tricky. You'll have to experiment.
- Skip the ice cream. Make what's technically a pawpaw shake, not a milkshake. Freeze pawpaw pulp in an ice cube tray and blend as many frozen cubes as you like with milk or non-dairy milk, and perhaps a little vanilla extract. Clearly this is a more healthful frozen beverage than either of the above. To make a richer vegan shake, add a small handful of raw cashews that have been soaked an hour or so.

Pawpaw Julius

Serves 2

An Orange Julius stall was a fixture at the food court in the mall closest to where I grew up. When mom would take me there to get school clothing at JCPenney, sometimes she'd splurge on their frothy signature drinks, a sort of cross between a smoothie and a pureed Creamsicle. The mall was only a twenty-five-minute drive away, but its abundant retail newness and lush fountain installations complete with turtles enchanted with a momentary promise of a stylish life.

That mall still stands, though the Orange Julius stand and turtle fountains are gone. It's in Vienna, West Virginia, separated from the banks of the Ohio River by industrial warehouses and train tracks. I bet you could find pawpaw trees not far from the outer reaches of the mall's parking lot--a short walk, but worlds away from the climate-controlled atriums of the Grand Central Mall.

For this to be a proper Julius, you need to first freeze the pawpaw pulp in ice cube trays before blending it. This gives you the fine-yet-icy texture that makes the drink so sippable. Don't skip the straw.

- 1 cup pawpaw pulp
- 1 cup ice
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1/2 cup orange juice
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

Freeze the pawpaw pulp in an ice cube tray (or trays) until firm, at least 8 hours.

To make the drink: combine the ice, frozen pawpaw cubes, milk, orange juice, sugar, and vanilla in a blender and blend until smooth. Check the consistency —you may need to thin it out with a little juice or milk, but you do want it to be thick. Divide between glasses and serve with straws.

MAKE IT VEGAN: Just use the non-dairy milk of your choice instead of the dairy milk.

Lemony Pawpaw Preserves

Makes 7-9 half-pint jars

This miraculous recipe breaks my cardinal rule of not canning pawpaws or cooking them on the stove, but it pays off. The key is powdered pectin, which cuts the cooking time enough to preserve the pawpaw's upbeat flavor. A hefty dose of lemon juice plays double duty, brightening up the pawpaw and helping the pectin set.

Don't tinker with the sugar or acid levels of this; they make it safe for canning, and ensure the pectin will set.

I dole these luscious preserves out jar by jar in the winter, when I need a minor dose of sunny cheer. They are splendid on rich Greek yogurt, or smeared on a piece of buttered toast. Sometimes I use petite 4-ounce jars, which make darling gifts.

- 6 cups pawpaw pulp
- 3 cups sugar
- 1/4 cup lemon juice
- 1/4 teaspoon table salt
- One 1.75-ounce packet powdered pectin

Have 10 sterile half-pint canning jars ready (you may not need all the jars, but it's good to have extra on deck in case). Prepare a stockpot for water-bath canning.

In a large Dutch oven or heavy-bottomed saucepan, combine the pawpaw pulp, sugar, lemon juice, and salt. Bring to a simmer over medium-high heat. (If you have an immersion blender, use it now to blend the mixture for silky-smooth preserves.)

Once the mixture comes to a boil, reduce it to a simmer and cook, stirring constantly, for 5 minutes. It will gurgle and spurt and launch lava-like shooters, so be careful.

Add the pectin. Boil 1 minute. Reduce the heat as low as possible and ladle the mixture into the jars, leaving 1/4" of headspace. Wipe any residue off the rims, set on the lids, and screw the bands on fingertip-tight.

Process the jars in the boiling water bath 10 minutes. Refrigerate any jars with

lids that didn't seal. Opened jars will keep about 1 month; unopened jars will keep at least 2 years, though are best used within a year.

VANILLA VARIATION: Halve a vanilla bean lengthwise, scrape out the seeds, and add the scraped-outs seeds plus the hulls to the pot along with the sugar and lemon juice at the beginning of the first step (if you plan on using an immersion blender, pull the hulls out first). Before ladling into the jars, fish out the hulls. I've also used 1-2 teaspoons spent ground vanilla beans, which we discuss in the Nilla Wafer Not-Banana Pawpaw Pudding (page 60).

Cinnamon-Spiced Pawpaw Butter

Makes 7-9 half-pint jars

This is nearly the same recipe as Lemony Pawpaw Preserves (page 82), but it has a totally different character, and thus a different name. It's a cousin of apple butter, dark with brown sugar and lightly spiced with cinnamon. I came up with it when I had quite a bit of slightly over-the-hill pawpaw pulp with alluring caramel undertones, but none of that tropical zing. I call pawpaws like this "rusty." Some people love their pawpaws that way, but I don't. I added cinnamon to cover the rustiness, and the results grew on me enough that I now make it on purpose.

6 cups pawpaw pulp (squishy brown-ripe pawpaws work better here)
3 cups light brown sugar
1/4 cup apple cider vinegar
2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon table salt
One 1.75-ounce packet powdered pectin

Have 10 sterile half-pint canning jars ready (you may not need all the jars, but it's good to have extra on deck in case). Prepare a stockpot for water-bath canning.

In a large Dutch oven or heavy-bottomed saucepan, combine the pawpaw pulp, brown sugar, vinegar, cinnamon, and salt. Bring to a simmer over medium-high heat.(If you have an immersion blender, use it now to blend the mixture for silky-smooth preserves.)

Once the mixture comes to a boil, reduce it to a simmer and cook, stirring constantly, for 5 minutes. It will gurgle and spurt and launch shooter like lava, so be careful.

Add the pectin to the pot. Boil 1 minute. Reduce the lowest heat as low as possible as you ladle the mixture into the jars, leaving 1/4" headspace. Wipe any residue off the rims, set on the lids, and screw the bands on fingertip-tight. Process in the canner 10 minutes. Refrigerate any jars with lids that didn't seal. Opened jars will keep about 1 month; unopened jars will keep at least 2 years, though are best used within a year.

Coconut-Lime Pawpaw Paletas

Makes six 3-ounce ice pops

Paletas are bright and flavorful frozen Mexican treats often made with fresh fruit, both pureed and in chunks: you'll find mango, strawberry, pineapple, mamey, and more. You won't see pawpaw paletas in Mexico, as it's south of the tree's range.

The added water might have you scratching your head, but it helps make these paletas icy enough to be refreshing on a late summer day as you recuperate from a sweaty outing of pawpaw gathering.

- 1-1/4 cups pawpaw pulp
- 1/2 cup coconut milk, well shaken
- 1/4 cup agave nectar
- 1/4 cup water
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- Pinch salt

Combine all the ingredients in a blender and blend until smooth. Divide between six 3-ounce ice pop molds and freeze overnight.

To unmold, run hot water over the mold for a few seconds.

VARIATIONS: For spicy paletas, omit the salt and add some Tajín seasoning (look for it in the Latin section at stores) to the paleta base, or sprinkle it on the unmolded paletas when you serve them. For speckled paletas, stir a few tablespoons of chia seeds into the paleta base after pureeing.

Pawpaw Products

Since the first zine-style *Pocket Pawpaw Cookbook* in 2015, the number of specialty food products made with pawpaw seems to have skyrocketed. If getting your hands on fresh pawpaws is a challenge, a specialty product may be the most accessible way to get a taste.

By using pawpaws, these regional, small-scale operations support other regional, small-scale operations. You can keep that momentum going by purchasing pawpaw products when you see them. Who knows what other pawpaw products we may see as time passes?

Pawpaw craft beer:
Independent breweries are easily the largest users of commercially produced pawpaw pulp. All along the Pawpaw Belt, craft brewers have featured pawpaws in IPAs, saisons, witbiers, and more. Often these are available on tap seasonally, though some breweries can or bottle them.

Pawpaw liqueur: A few craft distillers have begun making small batches of pawpaw liqueur.

Pawpaw preserves and chutneys:
Small-scale makers of jam, such as Parkersburg, West Virginia's In a Jam!, sell jarred preserves made with pawpaw.

Pawpaw ice cream: Jeni's Splendid Ice Cream (headquartered in Columbus, Ohio) and Zingerman's Creamery (of Ann Arbor, Michigan) make and ship pawpaw ice cream and gelato.

Pawpaw vinegar:
There's one maker of pawpaw vinegar I know of, and that's Virginia's Lindera Farms. Made with mead, their pawpaw vinegar is nuanced, smooth, and utterly delightful. I use it in fizzy temperance beverages.

Blender Pawpaw Coladas

Serves 3-4

Once blended with rum Coconut-Lime Pawpaw Paletas (page 86) make fantastic, unabashedly Jimmy Buffet-style party drinks. Cocktail purists may justifiably scoff at taking such liberties with a colada, and if so, I heartily suggest you come up with a catchy name for these and let me know.

The act of making blender drinks at a party is usually an impulsive one, but it's worth the foresight to pre-freeze the ingredients so you can get a proper boozy smoothie.

1-1/4 cups pawpaw pulp
1/2 cup canned coconut milk, well shaken
1/4 cup agave nectar
1/4 cup water
2 tablespoons lime juice
Pinch salt
1 cup chilled water
1/2 cup rum (I used dark, but white works)

Mix the pawpaw, coconut, agave, 1/4 cup water, lime juice, and salt in a bowl or quart glass measuring cup. Pour into an ice cube tray (or trays) and freeze until firm, at least 4 hours.

Put the frozen pawpaw cubes in a blender. Add the 1 cup chilled water and the rum. Blend until smooth. If needed, add just enough extra water to make the daiquiri easy to sip through a straw. Pour into campy tropical glasses, garnish with little umbrellas, and serve.

Pawpaw Bellini

Serves 8-10

A classic Italian sparkling wine cocktail made with white peaches and Prosecco, a Bellini is an ideal sunny day aperitif. The drink is named after the Venetian Renaissance painter Giovanni Bellini and originated at Harry's Bar in Venice in 1948.

Classically, it's made with white peach puree, so this adaptation is not truly a Bellini, but anyone who loves both sparkling wine and pawpaws won't care one whit. If you are a big lush and can't bear the thought of going all year long without assorted pawpaw cocktails, you can freeze puree in ice cube trays for fizzy drinks whenever the mood strikes.

- 2 cups pawpaw pulp
- 1/4-1/3 sugar
- 1/4 cup orange liqueur, such as Grand Marnier
- One 750 ml bottle well-chilled Prosecco, or any drinkable but not mind-blowing dry sparkling white wine

Combine the pawpaw pulp, 1/4 cup sugar, and orange liqueur in the pitcher of a blender. Puree, then taste. It should be sweet, but not candy-sweet; add a little more sugar, if needed. At this point, you can cover the mixture and refrigerate up to 4 hours.

At serving time, pour the Prosecco into a pitcher. Add the boozy pawpaw puree and stir gently until mostly combined. Pour into flutes and serve—the effervescence of the bubbles will make the puree rise to the top of the glass. This probably sounds gross, but I can attest that, if kept chilled, any leftovers are pretty good the next day. The bubbles will be long gone, but it will still taste fruity and luscious.

Pawpaw Curd

Makes 3-1/2 cups

Making fruit curd takes time, but the meditative minutes stirring at the stove do your brain good. It's the same brainspace as foraging: dialing into something outside of yourself, allowing a process to unfold at its own pace.

Custardy pawpaw is a natural in fruit curd. People have been known to eat this straight up by the spoonful, but if you want to be more civil, have it as an accompaniment for scones or biscuits, or marble into Pawpaw Swirl Cheesecake (page 94).

- 2 large eggs
- 2 large egg yolks
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 cups pawpaw pulp
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract

In a medium stainless-steel, nonstick, or enameled saucepan, beat the eggs, yolks, and sugar with a whisk until the sugar is mostly dissolved. Whisk in the lemon juice.

Place the pan over medium heat and cook, stirring constantly with a heat-resistant spatula, making sure to scrape the bottom and corners of the pan. Slowly, the mixture will turn more opaque and the spatula will start to make visible swaths through the mixture, 10-15 minutes. Then, keep stirring and cooking until the curd is as thick as sour cream and coats the spatula, 2-3 minutes more.

Remove from the heat and stir in the butter until it melts and the curd is smooth. Pour it into a medium bowl (no need to strain this; it gets pureed later). Lay a piece of plastic wrap directly on the surface and refrigerate until cool and set, at least 4 hours.

Remove the curd from the refrigerator. Using an immersion blender, food processor, or blender, puree the pawpaw pulp, vanilla, and cooked curd

together until smooth and combined. Transfer to a clean glass jar and cover tightly. The curd will keep about 1 month in the refrigerator. Freeze up to 6 months (I often freeze half the batch for later, since this makes so much).

Pawpaw Swirl Cheesecake

Serves 8-16

This recipe is epic. It has a ton of steps, plus you'll need a batch Pawpaw Curd (page 92) to create the namesake swirl in the cheesecake. This differs from the Pawpaw Cheesecake on page 46; it's not as pawpaw-forward, and it has a perk of citrus.

As with all cheesecakes, you'll want to make this a day in advance so it can set in the refrigerator. You get the best taste and texture that way.

I adapted this slightly from Elise Bauer's Perfect Cheesecake recipe on Simply Recipes, which she in turn adapted from Dorie Greenspan's cheesecake recipe. Isn't it cool how recipes grow and contract and evolve like an ongoing game of telephone?

For the crust:

Generous 1-1/2 cups (173g) graham cracker crumbs
(11 sheets of graham crackers)
2 tablespoons sugar
Pinch salt
3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

For the filling:

24 ounces (3 blocks) cream cheese, at room temperature
3/4 cup sugar
1/2 cup sour cream
1/2 cup heavy cream
1-1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract
1 teaspoon finely grated lemon zest
Pinch salt
3 large eggs
1 cup Pawpaw Curd (page 92)
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

To make the crust: Preheat the oven to 350°F and position the rack in lower third.

In a large bowl, combine the graham cracker crumbs with the sugar and salt.

Add the melted butter and work with your fingers until the butter is incorporated. Press into a 9" x 2-3/4" round springform pan (no need to grease). Bake 10 minutes.Remove from the oven and set aside.

To make the filling: Reduce the oven temperature to 325°F.

Put the cream cheese in the bowl of a food processor with at least a 7-cup capacity. Add the sugar, sour cream, heavy cream, vanilla, lemon zest, and salt. Pulse in 15-second bursts, scraping the sides down after each pulse. Process just until smooth. Add the eggs and pulse until incorporated (overmixing can cause cracks in the filling, or prompt it to overflow).

In a small bowl, mix the pawpaw curd and the flour.

Pour the cream cheese filling into the pan over the baked crust. Tap the pan on the counter to coax out air bubbles. Drop dollops of the pawpaw curd mixture on the filling. Grab a table knife and drag it through the dollops to marble (don't go crazy; you want very apparent streaks).

To bake the cheesecake: You reduced the oven to 325°F, right? Good. Set the pan on the foil sheet and wrap the foil around the bottom to catch possible drips if the springform leaks. Put the baking sheet with the springform on it in the oven on the rack over the steamy water bath.

Bake 1-1/2 hours, or until the cheesecake jiggles as one unit, like a Jell-O mold, when you nudge the pan. If the filling is sloshy, keep baking it. The top may be a little browned, which is fine.

Once you've determined the cheesecake is done, turn off the oven. Cool the cheesecake in the oven with the door ajar for 1 hour. This gentle cooling prevents the cheesecake from cracking. Don't freak out if the cheesecake deflates as it cools—it's normal.

After that hour in the oven is up, set the cheesecake on a cooling rack and cool to room temperature. Now you can finally pop it in the refrigerator. Get yourself a hot or cold drink and take a break, because you have earned it.

Refrigerate the cheesecake overnight before serving. You can refrigerate leftovers up to 4 days. Or wrap the entire cheesecake well in plastic and foil and freeze up to 3 months.

NOTE: If you'd like to make this in a pressure cooker, halve the recipe (use 1

whole egg and 1 yolk) and cook it in a 7” x 2-3/4” round springform pan following the instructions given with Pawpaw Cheesecake (page 46).

South Carolina Mustard Pawpaw Barbecue Sauce

Makes 1-1/4 cups

The authenticity of regional barbecue is serious business. This becomes particularly fiery in the Carolinas, where the definition of what is and isn't appropriate to serve on barbecue changes depending on proximity to the coast or the mountains, as well as the state border. North Carolinians frown on mustard-based barbecue sauce, though that state is richer in pawpaw culture than mustard-friendly South Carolina.

Sequestered here in Ohio, I take bold liberty with barbecue traditions, not only adding pawpaws to traditional South Carolina mustard sauce, but then serving it over smoked tofu cubes and calling it "barbecue."

This sauce is for mustard lovers only. It cuts through the fatty richness of pulled pork or grilled chicken thighs. For those who prefer more tomato or molasses-based barbecue sauces, here's a different recipe: stir 1 part pawpaw pulp into 2 parts bottled barbecue sauce.)

- 1/2 cup pawpaw pulp
- 6 tablespoons prepared yellow mustard
- 2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1-1/2 tablespoons ketchup
- 1-1/2 teaspoons molasses
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon hot red pepper sauce (such as Tabasco)

Stir everything together in a medium bowl. (For a very smooth sauce, puree in a blender, but I don't think it's necessary.) It's preferable to refrigerate the sauce 8 hours so the flavors can meld.

Refrigerate the sauce up to 2 weeks, though it can quite likely last longer than that. During this time, the pawpaw flavor will become stronger. You can also freeze it.

MAKE THIS VEGAN: Use agave nectar instead of the honey, and make sure the Worcestershire sauce you're using is vegan.

Pawpaw Kentucky Beer Cheese

Makes about 2-1/2 cups

Kentucky beer cheese is a regional institution. It's not the molten, fondue-like dip seen at game-day parties throughout the Midwest; it's served chilled or room temperature, more of a spread with the consistency of hummus.

Marrying beer cheese and pawpaw, two very Kentuckian foods, is a natural move. (Kentucky State University has the only full-time pawpaw research program in the world.) My friend Garin Pirnia invited me to come up with a recipe for her first book, *The*
Beer
Cheese
Book, published by University Press of Kentucky. To get extra crazy, use a pawpaw beer, or serve one on the side.

12 ounces extra-sharp orange cheddar cheese, grated
2 teaspoons dry ground mustard powder
2 cloves garlic, smashed
1-2 teaspoons red pepper sauce, such as Frank's Red Hot
1/3 cup pawpaw pulp, plus 1-2 tablespoons more if needed
Scant 1/3 cup pale ale, plus 1-2 tablespoons more if needed

Put the cheese, mustard, garlic, pepper sauce, and 1/3 cup of the pawpaw in the bowl of a food processor. Turn on and slowly pour 1/3 cup of the beer through the feed tube. If the beer cheese is too stiff, add more pawpaw or beer, one tablespoon at a time. You're aiming for a consistency that's spreadable but not runny.

Taste the beer cheese, preferably on a cracker or a carrot stick. Add more pepper sauce, if needed. It will mellow over time. Tightly covered and refrigerated, the beer cheese will keep for 2 weeks. Freeze up to 6 months.

Pork Chops with Mustard Pawpaw Cream Sauce

Serves 4

This makes a quick but classy pan sauce that turns an otherwise boring pork chop dinner into a meal to get excited about.

Instead of the pork chops, you could use pork cutlets, or pork tenderloins cut into medallions, or chicken cutlets, or even bone-in chicken thighs. Cutlets cook fast and need just a brief stint in the finished sauce, while chicken thighs and thick-cut pork chops require a good bit of simmering in the sauce as it reduces. Use your judgement and, if necessary, an instant-read thermometer to tell when the meat's done cooking.

- 4 boneless center-cut pork chops (1-1/2 to 2 pounds total)
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 shallot, minced
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 cup chicken stock
- 1 tablespoon whole-grain mustard
- 1/4 cup pawpaw pulp

Pat the meat dry and season both sides generously with salt and pepper. Set aside.

Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the oil, and when it ripples, add the pork. Cook until nicely browned, 3-4 minutes. Flip and cook until brown on the other side, 3-4 minutes longer. Remove the pork to a plate. Examine the skillet. If it's got burned patches, wipe it out with a paper towel. Otherwise, let it cool down a bit, and then add the butter. Return to the heat, melt the butter, add the shallot, and cook until translucent, 1-2 minutes. Add the cream, chicken stock, and mustard. Bring to a boil and cook, scraping the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon to loosen any brown bits. Return the pork to the pan and cook until the sauce is thick enough to have some good body.

Reduce the heat to low. Remove the pork chops again and stir the pawpaw

pulp into the sauce. Taste for seasoning and add a little salt, if needed. Return the pork to the pan one last time and let everything sit for a minute so the flavors can marry. The sauce tends to mysteriously thicken a little more during this period.

Divide the pork between plates and top with the sauce. Grind a little black pepper on top before serving, if you like.

Sunshine Salad Mold

Serves 6-8

This recipe is here to remind us not to get too precious about anything. Why not put pawpaws in Jell-O? I'm certainly not the first person to do so.

Sunshine salad may stir nostalgic feelings in the hearts of folks who were around during the middle of the twentieth century (or perhaps raised by a cook of that vintage). It's very straightforward: lemon Jell-O, crushed pineapple, grated carrots. Pawpaw is not original to Sunshine Salad, but it fits into the equation swimmingly.

As an experiment, I tried this with unflavored gelatin and fresh lemon juice, and the Jell-O version is way better. How can that be surprising? Sunshine salad was *designed* to be made with Jell-O.

One 3-ounce box lemon-flavored gelatin
1 cup boiling water
1 cup pawpaw pulp, chilled
1 teaspoon apple cider vinegar
1/2 cup canned crushed pineapple, drained
Pinch salt
1 cup finely grated carrots

Rummage through your things and find a mold or dish with at least a 3-1/2 cup capacity. I use a 3-1/2 cup fluted gelatin mold I got at a thrift store, but a glass loaf pan will work just fine. There's no need to grease the mold.

Empty the lemon gelatin into a medium heatproof bowl. Pour the boiling water over it and stir until dissolved. Add the pawpaw, vinegar, and salt. Refrigerate until the gelatin thickens slightly (it took mine about 1 hour).

Mix the carrots and crushed pineapple into the gloppy gelatin, then scrape into the mold or dish. Refrigerate until set, at least 2 hours.

To unmold, dip the mold into a bowl of warm water for 5 seconds. Invert onto a plate or serving platter and give it a few firm jostles, until it releases. If it's being stubborn, dip it in the water a few more seconds and try again. Present with pride at your potluck or barbecue or wherever you are serving this. People

will like it a lot more than they'll think.

The Pawpaw Stampede

In most settings, pawpaws take a lot of explaining. You can't just serve them without a lengthy preamble (this works to my advantage as a speaker and chef-instructor).

Places where pawpaw-curious people gather are a whole other ball of wax. At those, expect a frenzy! I brought a big dish of Nilla Wafer Pawpaw Pudding to the 2015 Ohio Pawpaw Festival to share as samples while I did a demo. Shortly after, a few people from the audience came up and meticulously scraped the dish clean with their tasting spoons. They probably would have licked it if they could have. (I was delighted, of course; clean plates flatter a chef.)

A few years later, I spoke on pawpaws at a *Mother*
Earth
News fair. I'd brought plenty of pawpaws and had extras, so after finishing I told attendees to help themselves if they'd never had a pawpaw before. You'd think it was 1983 and they were stampeding for Cabbage Patch Kids. The pawpaws were gone in less than a minute.

My favorite such memory is another time at the Ohio Pawpaw Festival, where they have contests for the biggest pawpaw and the best-tasting pawpaw. For the biggest pawpaw, entries are displayed so everyone can marvel at their girth (for a pawpaw, being the size of an average mango is quite impressive). Meanwhile, for the best-tasting papaw contest, judges must partially destroy the specimens in order to taste them. After the judging, kindly Ohio University student volunteers who staff the event moved the eviscerated pawpaws to a table behind the tent, and a handful of rabid aspiring pawpaw growers just descended on them—they wanted the seeds so they, too, could grow such fine-tasting pawpaws. The most reliable way to propagate pawpaws with the specific characteristics of a parent is grafting, not starting from seed. But there were no branches up for grabs—only pawpaw guts, which are rarely such a commodity. Imagine a day in the far future having raised trees that bore amazing pawpaws and bragging how they grew from swiped seeds!

Really Good Mayonnaise

Makes about 1-1/2 cups

A few years ago, I was in the middle of developing a mayonnaise recipe for a cooking website. There was a lot of homemade mayonnaise in the fridge. It was also the middle of pawpaw season, and I had a lot of pawpaw pulp in the fridge. You can guess where this is going.

Pawpaw mayonnaise is really good. There aren't many reasons to make pawpaw mayonnaise, but if you do, I think you will like it, because you are already predisposed to liking both pawpaws and mayonnaise. It's quite nice on a turkey sandwich. If you ran a fancypants deli or sandwich cart, imagine how attention-getting it would be to have a sandwich on your menu with pawpaw mayonnaise. People would order that sandwich just for the mayonnaise!

Instead of making mayonnaise from scratch, could you stir a dollop of pawpaw into a gob of mayonnaise? Yes, by all means. Adding mustard of some sort is a good idea, too, because the sweet pawpaw needs something edgy to set it off.

1 large egg yolk
3-5 tablespoons pawpaw pulp
1-2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1 cup neutral oil (I use canola oil)
As many drops of Tabasco sauce as you feel like, optional

In a blender, combine the egg yolk, 3 tablespoons of the pawpaw pulp, 1 tablespoon of the mustard, and all the lemon juice and salt. Pulse a few times so it's mixed but not aerated.

Have the oil ready in a glass measuring cup. Turn on the blender and add the oil in a thin stream.

At first it will look like a yellow disaster, but press on. Soon you'll have a pearly, creamy mixture that gets thicker the more oil you add.

Once all the oil is added, turn off the machine and taste the mayonnaise by dipping a carrot stick or piece of lettuce to get a better idea of what it'll be like on other food, which is how you will eat it. You may want to add more

mustard or pawpaw, or even salt, for that matter.

This mayonnaise will keep, tightly covered in the refrigerator, up to 1 week. Unless you run a restaurant, that's a lot of mayonnaise to go through in a week. How can you use it up? Chicken salad. Waldorf salad. Tuna salad. Tartar sauce. Remoulade

NOTE: My favorite way to make mayonnaise now is with an immersion blender. Combine the egg yolk, pawpaw, mustard, lemon juice, and salt in the bottom of a beaker or measuring cup with a narrow bottom. Put the immersion blender on top of it. *Without* running the immersion blender, pour all the oil on top so it creates its own layer. Now, turn the blender on. It'll gradually pull the oil floating on top down to the bottom, and after a minute, you'll have perfectly emulsified mayonnaise.

You can make this in a food processor, too, but you'll need to double the recipe for it to emulsify right.

You can also make it by hand, in which case you'll have to look the method up somewhere. This recipe is already way too long.

Pawpaw Spice Cupcakes with Lemon Cream Cheese Frosting

Makes 16 cupcakes

True to the soul of pawpaws, these are not fancy-schmancy cupcakes, but the kind of stir-together, folksy cupcakes you can throw together on a whim. Instead of the tidy piped turban of buttercream we often see on bakery cupcakes, I prefer somewhat sloppy smears of frosting. They have character.

You have a choice of frosting here. The cream cheese frosting below is classic, and it contrasts nicely with spice cake. For something a little more complementary, with a hint of pawpaw flavor, try Velvet Pawpaw Buttercream (page 114). Both have vegan options.

1-1/2 cup (213 grams) all-purpose flour
1-1/4 cup sugar
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
3/4 teaspoon ground cardamom
1/4 teaspoon ground mace or nutmeg
1/4 teaspoon table salt
1 cup pawpaw pulp
1/2 cup canola oil, melted coconut oil, or fruity extra-virgin olive oil
1/2 cup unsweetened non-dairy milk, or regular dairy milk
1 tablespoon lemon juice
Lemony Cream Cheese Frosting (see recipe on next page) or
Velvet Pawpaw Buttercream (see page 114)

Heat the oven to 350˚F and position a rack in the center. Line 16 cupcake tins with paper liners.

In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, sugar, baking powder, spices, and salt.

In a medium bowl, whisk together the pawpaw pulp, oil, milk, and lemon juice. Pour the pawpaw mixture over the flour mixture and fold together with a rubber spatula until the batter is smooth, with no dry streaks (you might have a few small lumps of pawpaw).

Spoon the batter into the prepared cupcake tins, filling them no more than 2/3

full. Bake until the tops are slightly golden brown, spring back when you gently touch their tops, and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, about 25-30 minutes. Pop the cupcakes from the pan and set on a wire rack. Cool completely before frosting.

Frosted cupcakes will keep, covered, at a cool room temperature for 4 days. If it's warm out and the icing is getting greasy, it's okay to keep them in the refrigerator.

NOTE: This recipe makes 16 cupcakes, and most cupcake tins hold 6 or 12 cupcakes. You can bake the excess batter in greased ramekins or custard cups.

Lemon Cream Cheese Frosting

Makes 2 cups, enough to frost 16 cupcakes with leftovers

8 ounces (1 block) cream cheese or vegan cream cheese substitute, softened
1 cup butter or vegan margarine, softened
2 cups powdered sugar
2 teaspoons lemon juice
1/2 teaspoon finely grated lemon zest

With a handheld or stand electric mixer, beat the cream cheese and butter until smooth. Add the powdered sugar, 1/2 cup at a time, and then add the lemon juice and lemon zest. If making ahead of time, refrigerate until ready to use and bring to room temperature for best spreadability.

You may very well have leftovers. You can freeze any unused frosting up to 6 months, but I recommend sandwiching it between graham crackers to enjoy as snacks straight from the freezer.

Velvet Pawpaw Buttercream

Makes about 2-1/2 cups

Here's a sneaky trick to get some pawpaw flavor in buttercream. When you add fruit purees to buttercream, they typically curdle, because there's too much moisture in the puree to mix with the butter. This gives you a frosting that's beaded and greasy.

The solution? Add pawpaw preserves or pawpaw butter, which are lower in moisture. If you are decorating a pawpaw cake (or a pawpaw-filled cake), this adds a subtle echo of pawpaw.

The other neat thing about this buttercream is the technique. It's what is called a boiled frosting or icing, and it's very old-fashioned—my mom recalls my grandmother making it, only using Crisco, not butter. You cook milk, flour, and sugar to a smooth paste on the stove, let it cool, and then beat it into softened butter. The result is amazingly silky, with none of the chalky-harsh flavor that buttercreams made with powdered sugar have. It's magic!

2/3 cup sugar
1/4 cup (40 grams) flour
Pinch salt
1 cup milk
1 cup unsalted butter, at room temperature
3 tablespoons Pawpaw Butter (page 84) or Pawpaw Preserves (page 82)
1 teaspoon vanilla

Put the sugar, flour, and salt in a medium saucepan and stir together to combine. Whisk in the milk, then cook over medium heat, whisking often, until very thick, 5-7 minutes. Scrape into a bowl, press plastic wrap directly on the surface, and refrigerate until cool, about 1 hour.

Beat the butter with an electric mixer until smooth. Beat in the cooled milk paste one tablespoon at a time, waiting until the first addition is fully incorporated before adding more. Stop periodically to scrape down the bowl. When all the milk paste is added, beat in the pawpaw butter or pawpaw preserves one tablespoon at a time, then beat in the vanilla. Don't be tempted to add more than 3 tablespoons of pawpaw enrichment or the buttercream may curdle.

Use right away, or refrigerate up to 3 days. Let the refrigerated buttercream soften a bit before beating it until it's fluffy and smooth, then proceed with decorating.

MAKE THIS VEGAN: Use the non-dairy milk of your choice and good-quality vegan butter. Since vegan butter is usually salted, omit the salt.

Pawpaw Fool

Serves 6

Fool is a low-key dessert of whipped cream swirled with crushed fruit. Typically it's made with berries, which texturally have more oomph than pawpaw pulp, so it's nice to serve this fool with something crisp on the side for contrast: think ginger thins, tuiles, or cream wafer rolls.

There are a bunch of ways you can go with fool. One is to portion it in individual cups. Another is to set out the whole dang bowl—if so, try to use a pretty one. You can serve it right after making it, but I think the texture and flavor is better after chilling a few hours.

2 cups heavy cream
2 tablespoons powdered sugar
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 cup pawpaw pulp
1 teaspoon lemon juice

Combine the cream and powered sugar in a large bowl and whip with a whisk or electric mixer until soft peaks form. Fold in the vanilla.

In a small bowl, mix the pawpaw pulp and lemon juice until combined.

Add half the pawpaw pulp to the whipped cream. Fold with a large rubber spatula until the pawpaw is fairly well distributed, but you can still see streaks. Add the remaining pulp and fold just a few strokes. You want big ribbons of pawpaw; overmixing will make the fool too homogenous.

Divide the mixture between serving cups and chill up to 4 hours. Serve cold.

VARIATION: Use 1 cup Pawpaw Curd (page 92) instead of the pawpaw pulp and lemon juice.

Make Your Own Pawpaw Recipes!

Are you inspired you to create your own pawpaw recipes? I hope so. Here are some pointers to guide your next adventure.

- Many recipes that call for pumpkin puree or mashed bananas can be adapted to include pawpaws instead. Some of them will be great and others won't.
- Vanilla, cinnamon, ginger, lemons, and limes all complement pawpaws nicely, but too heavy a hand with flavorings will overpower the pawpaw.
- Pawpaws love dairy and eggs. It's hard to go wrong with a pawpaw custard or dairy-rich pawpaw shake.
- Don't dehydrate pawpaws (using them in fruit leather, for instance). It often makes people feel nauseous for a few hours. Same goes for pawpaw in low-moisture recipes that are heated for prolonged times. I made an otherwise delightful pawpaw granola that nearly had me throwing up about fifteen minutes after breakfast. I ate it three mornings in a row before I figured out why I was feeling queasy in the mornings.
- Not everyone you love will love pawpaws. Don't take it personally.
- Take failures in stride. The most productive and creative people have the most failures, because they come up with ideas and are willing to give them a shot. The only way to know for sure if something works is to try it.

Resources

The pawpaw world is larger than you'd think, yet remarkably small—that is, everyone passionate about pawpaws seems to be interconnected. Because there are more pawpaw movers and shakers every year, this list is fated to be hopelessly incomplete. Which is a good thing.

To buy fresh or frozen pawpaws

Integration Acres | www.integrationacres.com

This Albany, Ohio company packages frozen pawpaw pulp under the Pawpaw Pleasures label and sells it though their website. They also sell fresh pawpaws in season.

Earthy Delights | www.earthy.com

You can order frozen pawpaw pulp and fresh pawpaws in season from this Michigan specialty foods retailer. They also carry Lindera Farms pawpaw vinegar, which is excellent.

A few spots to buy pawpaw trees

Peterson Pawpaws | www.petersonpawpaws.com

Sellers of Neal Peterson's seven trademarked pawpaw varieties, each painstakingly bred for optimum flavor, texture, size, and keeping quality. If you'd like to grow pawpaws, a Peterson sapling is a popular first step. The site offers information on seed germination, grafting, harvesting, and all the things you hope you'll need to put into practice when your pawpaws fruit.

England's Orchard and Nursery | www.nuttrees.net

In McKee, Kentucky, Cliff England's pawpaw orchard boasts enough pawpaw varieties that it could be a Pawpaw Hall of Fame.

Nash Nurseries | www.nashnurseries.com

Situated between Flint and Lansing, this Michigan nursery sells pawpaw trees, seedlings, seeds, plus frozen pulp in quantities between a pint and a gallon.

For more on pawpaw history and cultivation

The Ohio Pawpaw Festival | www.ohiopawpawfest.com

Founded by Chris Chmiel of Integration Acres, this annual festival in Albany,

Ohio celebrates all things pawpaw, with an emphasis on sustainability. It offers tons of wholesome fun, even for people who don't like pawpaws (my daughter can verify this).

For a festival that draws thousands and grows more every year, it's remarkably chill.

Those serious about pawpaws will thrill at panels and presentations at the Pawpaw Tent, where experts discuss brewing, demo cooking, and growers swap hard-learned tips.

A beer garden, jam bands, and inflatables and crafts for kids will keep pawpaw day trippers happy.

Ohio Pawpaw Growers Association | www.ohiopawpaw.com

Not only for Ohioans, this association is for pawpaw growers, from hobbyists to commercial operations, who want to network and learn from each other. Ron Powell is the main engine behind both OPGA and the affiliated North American Pawpaw Growers Association.

Kentucky State University Pawpaw Program |
www.pawpaw.kysu.edu

KSU is home to the only full-time pawpaw research program in the world. Their website is a one-stop depot for really nitty-gritty information on pawpaw propagation. KSU has hosted four International Pawpaw Conferences, and will hopefully do so again. These conferences, while sociable, are not the jolly frivolity of pawpaw festivals, but gatherings of botanists, horticulturalists, food scientists, and growers—the crème de la crème of hardcore pawpaw nerds—sharing research.

Pawpaw: In Search of America's Forgotten Fruit,
by Andrew Moore

Part history and part travelogue, this book is a pawpaw odyssey that considers the past and future of pawpaws, as well as the fruit's cultural significance and appeal.

For the Love of Pawpaws: A Mini Manual for Growing
and Caring For Pawpaws —from Seed to Table,
by Michael Judd

If you are curious about cultivating pawpaws, this colorful and comprehensive book is the best place to start. Judd, an edible landscape designer and permaculture educator in Maryland, offers step-by-step information on selecting, germinating, planting, and propagating pawpaws.

For more pawpaw recipes

Kentucky State University Pawpaw Program

KSU has online publications of pawpaw nutritional information and a small collection of recipes.

www.kysu.edu/academics/college-acs/school-of-ace/pawpaw/recipes-and-uses.php

The Edible Pawpaw

This folksy community cookbook was put together by The Ohio Pawpaw Grower's Association. It's out of print, but a new edition is in the works.

VEGAN RECIPES

Green Tomato and Pawpaw Salsa

Pawpaw Sorbet

Banana Pawpaw Ketchup

Ha-Ha Pawpaw Habanero Sauce

Lemony Pawpaw Preserves

Cinnamon-Spice Pawpaw Butter

Coconut-Lime Pawpaw Paletas

Blender Pawpaw Daiquiris

Pawpaw Bellini

South Carolina Mustard Pawpaw Barbecue Sauce

RECIPES WITH VEGAN VARIATIONS

Pawpaw Cornbread

Pawpaw Milkshake

Pawpaw Julius

Pawpaw Spice Cupcakes with Lemon Cream Cheese Frosting

Velvet Pawpaw Buttercream

GLUTEN-FREE RECIPES

Pawpaw Lassi
Green Tomato and Pawpaw Salsa
French Vanilla and Pawpaw Ice Cream
Pawpaw Caramel Sauce
Pawpaw Sorbet
Banana Pawpaw Ketchup
Ha-Ha Pawpaw Habanero Sauce
Beurre Blanc with a Hint of Pawpaw
Pawpaw Gelato
Pawpaw Flan
Pawpaw Milkshake
Pawpaw Julius
Lemony Pawpaw Preserves
Cinnamon-Spice Pawpaw Butter
Coconut-Lime Pawpaw Paletas
Blender Pawpaw Daiquiris
Pawpaw Bellini
Pawpaw Curd
South Carolina Mustard Pawpaw Barbecue Sauce
Pawpaw Kentucky Beer Cheese
Pork Chops with Mustard Pawpaw Cream Sauce
Sunshine Salad Mold
Really Good Mayonnaise
Pawpaw Fool

RECIPES WITH GLUTEN-FREE VARIATIONS

Baked Pawpaw Pudding
Pawpaw Cornbread

Acknowledgments

I self-published the first version of *The Pocket Pawpaw Cookbook* in 2015. It had twelve recipes and thirty-eight pages, and was more of a meaty zine than a proper cookbook. I got 473 copies printed and sold them at festivals and through my website. I also bartered a bunch and gave some away.

Anyone who's written a book will tell you the second it's out of their hands, they realize all sorts of things they want to change. In the five years after that cookbook zine came out, I learned more about pawpaws and created new recipes. This expanded version meant I could go all George Lucas on the things about the first one that nagged me, which is every writer's dream.

Thank you to the people who bought that first cookbook zine, and especially to the people who made it happen: Nikki Butler, Bobby Rosenstock, Leigh Cox, Carrie Havranek, and Joe Ryckebosch.

For this deluxe version, which came about in part because of a tweet by Meryl William Clark and a brainstorm during a solo pawpaw outing in the woods, thank you to Martha Bayne, Alexis Nikole Nelson, Andy Moore, Nancie McDermott, Rob Brannan, and all the libraries that hosted me for foraging presentations.

And thank you, all the pawpaw enthusiasts out there. It's always so fun to meet you and revel in your love of a humble, enchanting fruit.

About the Author

Sara Bir grew up in Mid-Ohio Valley, within spitting distance of hundreds of pawpaw trees. She never tasted one until she moved back decades later. She is the author of *Tasting Ohio* and the IACP Cookbook Award-winning *The Fruit Forager's Companion.* Her writing and recipes have appeared in many publications, and all over the internet.

"The best cookbooks convey not only how to use an ingredient but why an ingredient is special in the first place. *The Pocket Pawpaw Cookbook* is just that sort of resource—great recipes that make me want to go foraging in order to cook them!"
—Abra Berens, chef and author of the cookbooks *Ruffage* and *Grist*

"After reading this ardent paean to the tropical taste of the Alleghenian-Appalalachian-Midwestern pawpaw you'll find no

better guide to this prehistoric sustainer of sloths than Sara Bir."
—Mike Sula, food writer, *Chicago Reader*

What's a pawpaw? It's a fruit, and also a challenge, beloved by foragers, locus of folklore and desire. In *The Pocket Pawpaw Cookbook*, Sara Bir sets the humble pawpaw center stage, with detailed information on how to harvest, source, store, and—of course—cook with these uniquely Midwestern delicacies. Here you'll find recipes for pawpaw cornbread and pawpaw pudding; key lime pawpaw cheesecake and banana-pawpaw ketchup. Sidebars address questions as varied as "where can I buy frozen pawpaws?" and "how do I use pawpaw in a cocktail?" Written with humor and love for a curious subject, and featuring an introduction by Alexis Nikole Nelson, *The Pocket Pawpaw Cookbook* will inspire you to
both experiment in the kitchen and get out into the woods.

SARA BIR is a chef, writer, and plant nerd. Her book *The Fruit Forager's Companion* (Chelsea Green, 2018) won the 2019 IACP Reference and Technical Cookbook Award. A graduate of the Culinary Institute of
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